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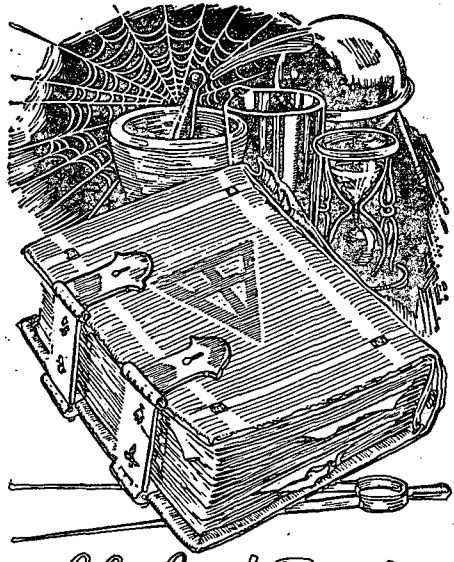

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FANTASTIC

FEBRUARY 1964

Volume 13 Number 2

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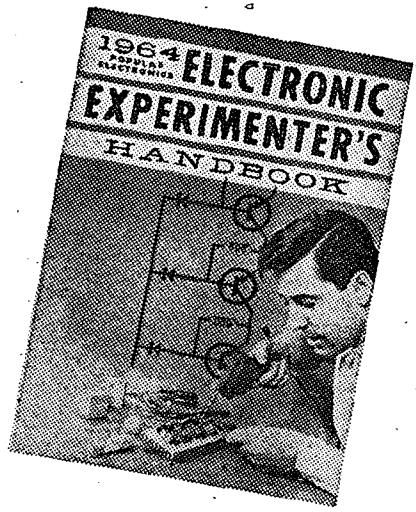

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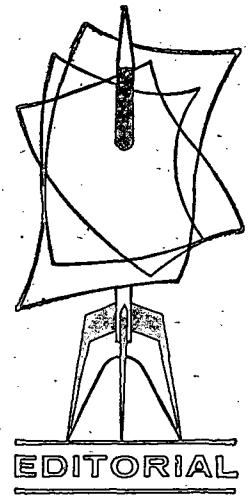

FOR some time now there have been rumors that both Russian and American scientists have been experimenting with anti-gravity devices (or at least attempting to find out what gravity is). Of course these rumors are pooh-poohed by the "realists" among us. Well, chances are both the US and the USSR *are* racing like mad to levitate an orbital station, instead of having expensively to shoot it up there. But what is actually going on in secret turns out to be even more fantastic.

The recent Fourteenth International Aeronautical Congress was told, by an American delegate, that both we and the Soviet are experimenting with mental telepathy as a medium of space communications. The delegate, Dr. Eugene Konecci, director of NASA's Biotechnology and Human Research section, said Russia is giving top priority to what is called "'biological radio communication." (God forbid they should call it something wild and weird like "psi power.")

The immediate aim of the experimentation is to enable man on Earth to communicate instantaneously with man on the Moon without electronic equipment (which can be monitored by the other side). The Soviets claim good (but secret, natch) results. Meanwhile our side, late as usual, has held "encouraging but non-conclusive" tests between two persons, one of whom was riding on a submarine. (One hopes they weren't using the five-card-symbols of the good Dr. Rhine. For if our submarine telepath happened also to be a prey to seasickness, that "wavy-line" symbol would be a dangerous one, stomach-wise.)

Well, there's always a silver lining. We may be slow, we may be late, and we may be inconclusive. But at least good old hard-nosed science, with appropriations from Congress yet, *is* finally getting around to the idea that we *can* talk to one another without opening our mouths, electronic or otherwise.—NL.

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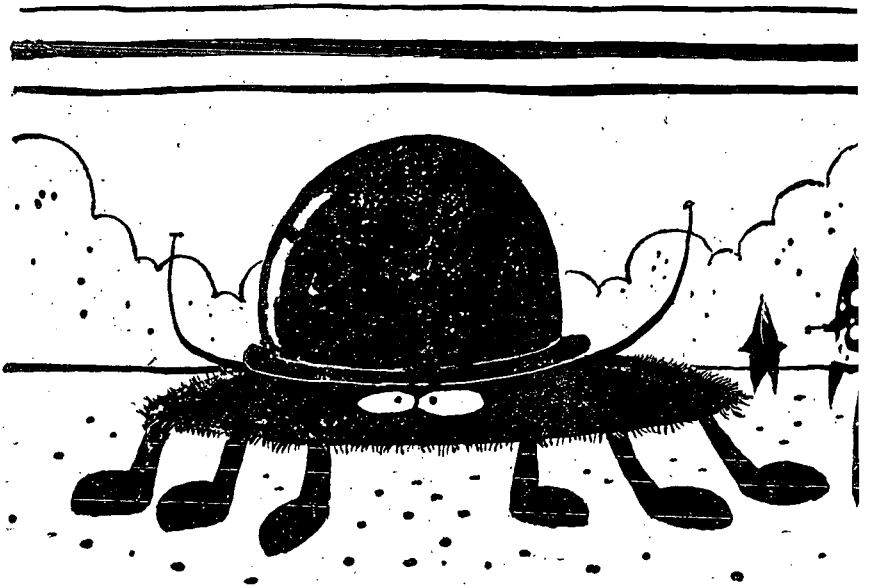
novelty act

By PHILIP K. DICK

If you carry to their illogical lengths the ideas of cooperative housing, culture-mania and amateur nights, you might begin to approximate the conditions under which the Brown brothers did their jug-playing music. A satiric extravaganza.

LIGHTS burned late in the great communal apartment building Abraham Lincoln, because this was All Souls night: the residents, all six hundred of them, were required by their charter to attend, down in the subsurface community hall. They



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filed in briskly, men, women and children; at the door Bruce Corley, operating their rather expensive new identification reader, checked each of them in turn to be sure that no one from outside, from another communal apartment building, got in. The residents submitted good-naturedly, and it all went very fast.

"Hey Bruce, how much'd it set us back?" asked old Joe Purd, oldest resident in the building; he had moved in with his wife and two children the day the building, in May of 1980, had been built. His wife was dead now and the children had grown up, married and moved on, but Joe remained.

"Plenty," Bruce Corley said, "but it's error-proof; I mean, it isn't just subjective." Up to now, in his permanent job as sergeant of arms, he had admitted people merely by his ability to recognize them. But that way he had at last let in a pair of goons from Red Robin Hill Manor and they had disrupted the entire meeting with their questions and comments. It would not happen again.

Passing out copies of the agenda, Mrs. Wells smiled fixedly and chanted, "Item 3 A, Appropriation for Roof Repairs, has been moved to 4 A. Please make a note of that." The residents accepted their agendas and then divided into two streams flowing to opposite sides of the hall; the liberal faction of the building seated themselves on the right and the conservatives on the left, each conspicuously ignoring the existence of the other. A few uncommitted persons—newer residents or odd-balls—took seats in the rear, self-conscious and silent as the room buzzed with many small conferences. The tone, the mood of the room, was tolerant, but the residents knew that tonight there was going to be a clash. Presumably, both sides were prepared. Here and there documents, petitions, newspaper clippings rustled as they were read and exchanged, handed back and forth.

On the platform, seated at the table with the four governing building trustees, chairman Donald Klugman felt sick at his stomach. A peaceful man, he shrank from these violent squabbles. Even seated in the audience he found it too much for him, and here tonight he would have to take active part; time and tide had rotated the chair around to him, as it did to each resident in turn, and of course it would be the night the school issue reached its climax.

THE room had almost filled and now Patrick Doyle, the current building sky pilot, looking none too happy in his long white robe, raised his hands for si-

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lence. "The opening prayer," he called huskily, cleared his throat and brought forth a small card. "Everyone please shut their eyes and bow their heads." He glanced at Klugman and the trustees, and Klugman nodded for him to continue. "Heavenly father," Doyle said, "we the residents of the communal apartment building Abraham Lincoln beseech You to bless our assembly tonight. Um, we ask that in Your mercy You enable us to raise the funds for the roof repairs which seem imperative. We ask that our sick be healed and our unemployed find jobs and that in processing applicants wishing to live amongst us we show wisdom in whom we admit and whom we turn away. We further ask that no outsiders get in and disrupt our law-abiding, orderly lives and we ask in particularly that lastly, if it be Thy will, that Nicole Thibodeaux be free of her sinus headaches which have caused her not to appear before us on TV lately, and that those headaches not have anything to do with that time two years ago, which we all recall, when that stagehand allowed that weight to fall and strike her on the head, sending her to the hospital for several days. Anyhow, amen."

The audience agreed, "Amen."

Rising from his chair, Klugman said, "Now, before the business of the meeting, we'll have a few minutes of our own talent displayed for our enjoyment. First, the three Fetersmoller girls from apartment number 205. They will do a soft-shoe dance to the tune of 'I'll Build a Stairway to the Stars.'" He reseated himself, and onto the stage came the three little blonde-haired children, familiar to the audience from many talent shows in the past.

As the Fetersmoller girls in their striped pants and glittery silver jackets shuffled smilingly through their dance, the door to the outside hall opened and a late-comer, Edgar Stone, appeared.

He was late, this evening, because he had been grading test papers of his next-door neighbor, Mr. Ian Duncan, and as he stood in the doorway his mind was still on the test and the poor showing which Duncan—whom he barely knew—had made. It seemed to him that without even having finished the test he could see that Duncan had failed.

On the stage the Fettersmoller girls sang in their scratchy voices, and Stone wondered why he had come. Perhaps for no more reason than to avoid the fine, it being mandatory for the residents to be here, tonight. These amateur talent shows, put on so often, meant nothing to him; he recalled the old days when the TV set had carried en-

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tertainment, good shows put on by professionals. Now of course all the professionals who were any good were under contract to the White House, and the TV had become educational, not entertaining. Mr. Stone thought of great old late-late movies with comics such as Jack Lemmon and Shirley McLaine, and then he looked once more at the Fettersmoller girls and groaned.

Corley, hearing him, glanced at him severely.

At least he had missed the prayer. He presented his identification to Corley's new machine and it allowed him to pass down the aisle toward a vacant seat. Was Nicole watching this, tonight? Was a White House talent scout present somewhere in the audience? He saw no unfamiliar faces. The Fettersmoller girls were wasting their time. Seating himself, he closed his eyes and listened, unable to endure watching. They'll never make it, he thought. They'll have to face it, and so will their ambitious parents; they're untalented, like the rest of us . . . Abraham Lincoln Apartments has added little to the cultural store of the nation, despite its sweaty, strenuous determination, and you are not going to be able to change that.

THE hopelessness of the Fettersmoller girls' position made him remember once more the test papers which Ian Duncan, trembling and waxen-faced, had pressed into his hands early that morning. If Duncan failed he would be even worse-off than the Fettersmoller girls because he would not even be living at Abraham Lincoln; he would drop out of sight—their sight, anyhow—and would revert to a despised and ancient status: he would find himself once more living in a dorm, working on a manual gang as they had all done back in their teens.

Of course he would also be refunded the money which he had paid for his apartment, a large sum which represented the man's sole major investment in life. From one standpoint, Stone envied him. What would I do, he asked himself as he sat eyes closed, if I had my equity back right now, in a lump sum? Perhaps, he thought, I'd emigrate. Buy one of those cheap, illegal jalopies they peddle at those lots which—

Clapping hands roused him. The girls had finished, and he, too, joined in the applause. On the platform, Klugman waved for silence. "Okay, folks, I know you enjoyed that, but there's lots *more* in store, tonight. And then there's the business part of the meeting; we mustn't forget that." He grinned at them.

Yes, Stone thought. The busi-

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ness. And he felt tense, because he was one of the radicals at Abraham Lincoln who wanted to abolish the building's grammar school and send their children to a public grammar school where they would be exposed to children from other buildings entirely.

It was the kind of idea which met much opposition. And yet, in the last weeks, it had gained support. What a broadening experience it would be; their children would discover that people in other apartment buildings were no different from themselves. Barriers between people of all apartments would be torn down and a new understanding would come about.

At least, that was how it struck Stone, but the conservatives did not see it that way. Too soon, they said, for such mixing. There would be outbreaks of fights as the children clashed over which building was superior. In time it would happen . . . but not now, not so soon.

* * *

Risking the severe fine, Ian Duncan missed the assembly and remained in his apartment that evening, studying official Government texts on the religio-political history of the United States—*relpols*, as they were called. He was weak in this, he knew; he could barely comprehend the economic factors, let alone all the religious and political ideologies that had come and gone during the twentieth century, directly contributing to the present situation. For instance, the rise of the Democratic-Republican Party. Once it had been two parties, engaging in wasteful quarrels, in struggles for power, just the way buildings fought now. The two parties had merged, about 1985. Now there was just the one party, which had ruled a stable and peaceful society, and everyone belonged to it. Everyone paid dues and attended meetings and voted, each four years, for a new President —for the man they thought Nicole would like best.

It was nice to know that they, the people, had the power to decide who would become Nicole's husband, each four years; in a sense it gave to the electorate supreme power, even above Nicole herself. For instance, this last man, Taufic Negal. Relations between him and the First Lady were quite cool, indicating that she did not like this most recent choice very much. But of course being a lady she would never let on.

When did the position of First Lady first begin to assume stature greater than that of President? the *relpol* text inquired. In other words, when did our society become matriarchal, Ian Duncan said to himself. Around

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about 1990; I know the answer to that. There were glimmerings before that; the change came gradually. Each year the President became more obscure, the First Lady became better known, more liked, by the public. It was the public which brought it about. Was it a need for mother, wife, mistress, or perhaps all three? Anyhow they got what they wanted; they got Nicole and she is certainly all three and more besides.

In the corner of his living room the television set said *taaaaang*, indicating that it was about to come on. With a sigh, Ian Duncan closed the official U.S. Government text book and turned his attention to the screen. A special, dealing with activities at the White House, he speculated. One more tour, perhaps, or a thorough scrutiny (in massively-detailed depth) of a new hobby or pursuit of Nicole's. Has she taken up collecting bone-china cups? If so, we will have to view each and every Royal Albert blue.

Sure enough, the round, wattled features of Maxwell Jamison, the White House news secretary, appeared on the screen. Raising his hand, Jamison made his familiar gesture of greeting. "Evening, people of this land of ours," he said solemnly. "Have you ever wondered what it would be like to descend to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean? Nicole has, and to answer that question she has assembled in the Tulip Room of the White House three of the world's foremost oceanographers. Tonight she will ask them for their stories, and you will hear them, too, as they were taped live, just a short while ago through the facilities of the Unified Triadic Networks' Public Affairs Bureau."

And now to the White House, Ian Duncan said to himself. At least vicariously. We who can't find our way there, who have no talents which might interest the First Lady even for one evening: we get to see in anyhow, through the carefully-regulated window of our television set.

Tonight he did not really want to watch, but it seemed expedient to do so; there might be a surprise quiz on the program, at the end. And a good grade on a surprise quiz might well offset the bad grade he had surely made on the recent political test, now being corrected by his neighbor Mr. Stone.

ON the screen bloomed now lovely, tranquil features, the pale skin and dark, intelligent eyes, the wise and yet pert face of the woman who had come to monopolize their attention, on whom an entire nation, almost an entire planet, dwelt obsessively. At the sight of her, Ian Duncan

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felt engulfed by fear. He had failed her; his rotten test results were somehow known to her and although she would say nothing, the disappointment was there.

"Good evening," Nicole said in her soft, slightly-husky voice.

"It's this way," Ian Duncan found himself mumbling. "I don't have a head for abstractions; I mean, all this religio-political philosophy—it makes no sense to me. Couldn't I just concentrate on concrete reality? I ought to be baking bricks or turning out shoes." I ought to be on Mars, he thought, on the frontier. I'm flunking out here; at thirty-five I'm washed up, *and she knows it.* Let me go, Nicole, he thought in desperation. Don't give me any more tests, because I don't have a chance of passing them. Even this program about the ocean's bottom; by the time it's over I'll have forgotten all the data. I'm no use to the Democratic-Republican party.

He thought about his brother, then. Al could help me. Al worked for Loony Luke, at one of his jalopy jungles, peddling the little tin and plastic ships that even defeated people could afford, ships that could, if luck was with them, successfully make a one-way trip to Mars. Al, he said to himself, you could get me a jalopy—wholesale.

On the TV screen, Nicole was saying, "And really, it is a world of much enchantment, with luminous entities far surpassing in variety and in sheer delightful wonder anything found on other planets. Scientists compute that there are more forms of life in the ocean—"

Her face faded, and a sequence showing odd, grotesque fish segued into its place. This is part of the deliberate propaganda line, Ian Duncan realized. An effort to take our minds off of Mars and the idea of getting away from the Party . . . and from her. On the screen a bulbous-eyed fish gaped at him, and his attention, despite himself, was captured. Chrissakes, he thought, it is a weird world down there. Nicole, he thought, you've got me trapped. If only Al and I had succeeded; we might be performing right now for you, and we'd be happy. While you interviewed world-famous oceanographers Al and I would be discreetly playing in the background, perhaps one of the Bach "Two Part Inventions."

Going to the closet of his apartment, Ian Duncan bent down and carefully lifted a cloth-wrapped object into the light. We had so much youthful faith in this, he recalled. Tenderly, he unwrapped the jug; then, taking a deep breath, he blew a couple of hollow notes on it. The Duncan Brothers and Their Two-man Jug Band, he and Al had

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been, playing their own arrangements for two jugs of Bach and Mozart and Stravinsky. But the White House talent scout—the skunk. He had never even given them a fair audition. It had been done, he told them. Jesse Pigg, the fabulous jug-artist from Alabama, had gotten to the White House first, entertaining and delighting the dozen and one members of the Thibodeaux family gathered there with his version of "Derby Ram" and "John Henry" and the like.

"But," Ian Duncan had protested, "this is *classical* jug. We play late Beethoven sonatas."

"We'll call you," the talent scout had said briskly. "If Nicky shows an interest at any time in the future."

Nicky! He had blanched. Imagine being that intimate with the First Family. He and Al, mumbling pointlessly, had retired from the stage with their jugs, making way for the next act, a group of dogs dressed up in Elizabethan costumes portraying characters from Hamlet. The dogs had not made it, either, but that was little consolation.

"I am told," Nicole was saying, "that there is so little light in the ocean depths that, well, observe this strange fellow." A fish, sporting a glowing lantern before him, swam across the TV screen.

Startling him, there came a knock on the apartment door. With anxiety Duncan answered it; he found his neighbor Mr. Stone standing there, looking nervous.

"You weren't at All Souls?" Mr. Stone said. "Won't they check and find out?" He held in his hands Ian Duncan's corrected test.

Duncan said, "Tell me how I did." He prepared himself.

Entering the apartment, Stone shut the door after him. He glanced at the TV set, saw Nicole seated with the oceanographers, listened for a moment to her, then abruptly said in a hoarse voice, "You did fine." He held out the test.

Duncan said, "I passed?" He could not believe it. He accepted the papers, examined them with incredulity. And then he understood what had happened. Stone had conspired to see that he passed; he had falsified the score, probably out of humanitarian motives. Duncan raised his head and they looked at each other, neither speaking. This is terrible, Duncan thought. What'll I do now? His reaction amazed him, but there it was.

I wanted to fail, he realized. Why? So I can get out of here, so I would have an excuse to give up all this, my apartment and my job, and go. Emigrate with nothing more than the shirt on my back, in a jalopy that falls to

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pieces the moment it comes to rest in the Martian wilderness.

"Thanks," he said glumly.

In a rapid voice, Stone said, "You can do the same for me sometime."

"Oh yeah, be happy to," Duncan said.

Scuttling back out of the apartment, Stone left him alone with the TV set, his jug and the falsely-corrected test papers, and his thoughts.

Al, you've got to help me, he said to himself. You've got to get me out of this; I can't even fail on my own.

IN the little structure at the back of Jalopy Jungle No. 3, Al Duncan sat with his feet on the desk, smoking a cigarette and watching passers-by, the sidewalk and people and stores of downtown Reno, Nevada. Beyond the gleam of the new jalopies parked with flapping banners and streamers cascading from them he saw a shape waiting, hiding beneath the sign that spelled out LOONY LUKE.

And he was not the only person to see the shape; along the sidewalk came a man and woman with a small boy trotting ahead of them, and the boy, with an exclamation, hopped up and down, gesturing excitedly. "Hey, Dad, look! You know what it is? Look, it's the papoola."

"By golly," the man said with a grin, "so it is. Look, Marion, there's one of those Martian creatures, hiding there under that sign. What do you say we go over and chat with it?" He started in that direction, along with the boy. The woman, however, continued along the sidewalk.

"Come on, Mom!" the boy urged.

In his office, Al lightly touched the controls of the mechanism within his shirt. The papoola emerged from beneath the LOONY LUKE sign, and Al caused it to waddle on its six stubby legs toward the sidewalk, its round, silly hat slipping over one antenna, its eyes crossing and uncrossing as it made out the sight of the woman. The tropism being established, the papoola trudged after her, to the delight of the boy and his father.

"Look, Dad, it's following Mom! Hey Mom, turn around and see"!

The woman glanced back, saw the platter-like organism with its orange bug-shaped body, and she laughed. Everybody loves the papoola, Al thought to himself. See the funny Martian papoola. Speak, papoola; say hello to the nice lady who's laughing at you.

The thoughts of the papoola, directed at the woman, reached Al. It was greeting her, telling her how nice it was to meet her, soothing and coaxing her until she came back up the sidewalk

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toward it, joining her boy and husband so that now all three of them stood together, receiving the mental impulses emanating from the Martian creature which had come here to Earth with no hostile plans, no capacity to cause trouble. The papoola loved them, too, just as they loved it; it told them so right now—it conveyed to them the gentleness, the warm hospitality which it was accustomed to on its own planet.

WHAT a wonderful place Mars must be, the man and woman were no doubt thinking, as the papoola poured out its recollections, its attitude. Gosh, it's not cold and schizoid, like Earth society; nobody spies on anybody else, grades their innumerable political tests, reports on them to building Security committees week in, week out. Think of it, the papoola was telling them as they stood rooted to the sidewalk, unable to pass on. You're your own boss, there, free to work your land, believe your own beliefs, become *yourself*. Look at you, afraid even to stand here listening. Afraid to—

In a nervous voice the man said to his wife, "We better go."

"Oh no," the boy said pleadingly. "I mean, gee, how often do you get to talk to a papoola? It must belong to that jalopy jungle, there." The boy pointed, and Al found himself under the man's keen, observing scrutiny.

The man said, "Of course. They landed here to sell jalopies. It's working on us right now, softening us up." The enchantment visibly faded from his face. "There's the man sitting in there operating it."

But, the papoola thought, what I tell you is still true. Even if it is a sales pitch. You could go there, to Mars, yourself. You and your family can see with your own eyes—if you have the courage to break free. Can you do it? Are you a real man? Buy a Loony Luke jalopy . . . buy it while you still have the chance, because you know that someday, maybe not so long from now, the law is going to crack down. And there will be no more jalopy jungles. No more crack in the wall of the authoritarian society through which a few—a few lucky people—can escape.

Fiddling with the controls at his midsection, Al turned up the gain. The force of the papoola's psyche increased, drawing the man in, taking control of him. You must buy a jalopy, the papoola urged. Easy payment plan, service warranty, many models to choose from. The man took a step toward the lot. Hurry, the papoola told him. Any second now the authorities may close down the lot and your opportunity will be gone forever.

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"This is how they work it," the man said with difficulty. "The animal snares people. Hypnosis. We have to leave." But he did not leave; it was too late: he was going to buy a jalopy, and Al, in the office with his control box, was reeling the man in.

Leisurely, Al rose to his feet. Time to go out and close the deal. He shut off the papoola, opened the office door and stepped outside onto the lot—and saw a once-familiar figure threading its way among the jalopies, toward him. It was his brother Ian and he had not seen him in years. Good grief, Al thought. What's he want? And at a time like this—

"Al," his brother called, gesturing. "Can I talk with you a second? You're not too busy, are you?" Perspiring and pale, he came closer, looking about in a frightened way. He had deteriorated since Al had last seen him.

"Listen," Al said, with anger. But already it was too late; the couple and their boy had broken away and were moving rapidly on down the sidewalk.

"I don't mean to bother you," Ian mumbled.

"You're not bothering me," Al said as he gloomily watched the three people depart. "What's the trouble, Ian? You don't look very well; are you sick? Come on in the office." He led his brother inside and shut the door.

IAN said, "I came across my jug. Remember when we were trying to make it to the White House? Al, we have to try once more. Honest to god, I can't go on like this; I can't stand to be a failure at what we agreed was the most important thing in our lives." Panting, he mopped at his forehead with his handkerchief, his hands trembling.

"I don't even have my jug any more," Al said presently.

"You must. Well, we could each record our parts separately on my jug and then synthesize them on one tape, and present that to the White House. This trapped feeling; I don't know if I can go on living with it. I have to get back to playing. If we started practicing right now on the 'Goldberg Variations' in two months we—"

Al broke in, "You still live at that place? That Abraham Lincoln?"

Ian nodded.

"And you still have that position down in Palo Alto, you're still a gear inspector?" He could not understand why his brother was so upset. "Hell, if worst comes to worst you can emigrate. Jug-playing is out of the question; I haven't played for years, since I last saw you in fact. Just a minute." He dialed the knobs of the mechanism which controlled the papoola; near the sidewalk the creature responded

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and began to return slowly to its spot beneath the sign.

Seeing it, Ian said, "I thought they were all dead."

"They are," Al said.

"But that one out there moves and—"

"It's a fake," Al said. "A puppet. I control it." He showed his brother the control box. "It brings in people off the sidewalk. Actually, Luke is supposed to have a real one on which these are modeled. Nobody knows for sure and the law can't touch Luke because technically he's now a citizen of Mars; they can't make him cough up the real one, if he does have it." Al seated himself and lit a cigarette. "Fail your *relpol* test," he said to Ian, "lose your apartment and get back your original deposit; bring me the money and I'll see that you get a damn fine jalopy that'll carry you to Mars. Okay?"

"I tried to fail my test," Ian said, "but they won't let me. They doctored the results. They don't want me to get away."

"Who's 'they'?"

"The man in the next apartment. Ed Stone, his name is. He did it deliberately; I saw the look on his face. Maybe he thought he was doing me a favor . . . I don't know." He looked around him. "This is a nice little office you have here. You sleep in it, don't you? And when it moves, you move with it."

"Yeah," Al said, "we're always ready to take off." The police had almost gotten him a number of times, even though the lot could obtain orbital velocity in six minutes. The papoola had detected their approach, but not sufficiently far in advance for a comfortable escape; generally it was hurried and disorganized, with part of his inventory of jalopies being left behind.

"You're just one jump ahead of them," Ian mused. "And yet it doesn't bother you. I guess it's all in your attitude."

"If they get me," Al said, "Luke will bail me out." The shadowy, powerful figure of his boss was always there, backing him up, so what did he have to worry about? The jalopy tycoon knew a million tricks. The Thibodeaux clan limited their attacks on him to deep-think articles in popular magazines and on TV, harping on Luke's vulgarity and the shoddiness of his vehicles; they were a little afraid of him, no doubt.

"I envy you," Ian said. "Your poise. Your calmness."

"Doesn't your apartment building have a sky pilot? Go talk to him."

Ian said bitterly, "That's no good. Right now it's Patrick Doyle and he's as bad off as I am. And Don Klugman, our chairman, is even worse off; he's a bundle of nerves. In fact our

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whole building is shot through with anxiety. Maybe it has to do with Nicole's sinus headaches."

Glancing at his brother, Al saw that he was actually serious. The White House and all it stood for meant that much to him; it still dominated his life, as it had when they were boys. "For your sake," Al said quietly, "I'll get my jug out and practice. We'll make one more try."

Speechless, Ian gaped at him in gratitude.

SEATED together in the business office of the Abraham Lincoln, Don Klugman and Patrick Doyle studied the application which Mr. Ian Duncan of no. 304 had filed with them. Ian desired to appear in the twice-weekly talent show, and at a time when a White House talent scout was present. The request, Klugman saw, was routine, except that Ian proposed to do his act in conjunction with another individual *who did not live at Abraham Lincoln.*

Doyle said, "It's his brother. He told me once; the two of them used to have this act, years ago. Baroque music on two jugs. A novelty."

"What apartment house does his brother live in?" Klugman asked. Approval of the application would depend on how relations stood between the Abraham Lincoln and the other building.

"None. He sells jalopies for that Loony Luke—you know. Those cheap little ships that get you just barely to Mars. He lives on one of the lots, I understand. The lots move around; it's a nomadic existence. I'm sure you've heard."

"Yes," Klugman agreed, "and it's totally out of the question. We can't have that act on our stage, not with a man like that involved in it. There's no reason why Ian Duncan can't play his jug; it's a basic political right and I wouldn't be surprised if it's a satisfactory act. But it's against our tradition to have an outsider participate; our stage is for our own people exclusively, always has been and always will. So there's no need even to discuss this." He eyed the sky pilot critically.

"True," Doyle said, "but it is a blood relative of one of our people, right? It's legal for one of us to invite a relative to watch the talent shows . . . so why not let him participate? This means a lot to Ian; I think you know he's been failing, lately. He's not a very intelligent person. Actually, he should be doing a manual job, I suppose. But if he has artistic ability, for instance this jug concept—"

Examining his documents, Klugman saw that a White House scout would be attending a show at the Abraham Lincoln

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in two weeks. The best acts at the building would of course be scheduled that night . . . the Duncan Brothers and Their Baroque Jug Band would have to compete successfully in order to obtain that privilege, and there were a number of acts which—Klugman thought—were probably superior. After all, *jugs* . . . and not even electronic jugs, at that.

"All right," he said aloud to Doyle. "I agree."

"You're showing your humane side," the sky pilot said, with a grin of sentimentality which disgusted Klugman. "And I think we'll all enjoy the Bach and Vivaldi as played by the Duncan Brothers on their inimitable jugs."

Klugman, wincing, nodded.

ON the big night, as they started into the auditorium on floor one of Abraham Lincoln Apartments, Ian Duncan saw, trailing along behind his brother, the flat, scuttling shape of the Martian creature, the papoola. He stopped short. "You're bringing that along?"

Al said, "You don't understand. Don't we have to win?"

After a pause, Ian said, "Not that way." He understood, all right; the papoola would take on the audience as it had taken on sidewalk traffic. It would exert its extra-sensory influence on them, coaxing out a favorable decision. So much for the ethics of a jalopy salesman, Ian realized. To his brother, this seemed perfectly normal; if they couldn't win by their jug-playing they would win through the papoola.

"Aw," Al said, gesturing, "don't be your own worst enemy. All we're engaged in here is a little subliminal sales technique, such as they've been using for a century—it's an ancient, reputable method of swinging public opinion your way. I mean, let's face it; we haven't played the jug professionally in years." He touched the controls at his waist and the papoola hurried forward to catch up with them. Again Al touched the controls—

And in Ian's mind a persuasive thought came, *Why not?* Everyone else does it.

With difficulty he said, "Get that thing off me, Al."

Al shrugged. And the thought, which had invaded Ian's mind from without, gradually withdrew. And yet, a residue remained. He was no longer sure of his position.

"It's nothing compared to what Nicole's machinery can accomplish," Al pointed out, seeing the expression on his face. "One papoola here and there, and that planet-wide instrument that Nicole has made out of TV—there you have the real danger, Ian. The papoola is crude; you

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know you're being worked on. Not so when you listen to Nicole. The pressure is so subtle and so complete—"

"I don't know about that," Ian said, "I just know that unless we're successful, unless we get to play at the White House, life as far as I'm concerned isn't worth living. And nobody put that idea in my head. It's just the way I feel; it's my own idea, dammit." He held the door open, and Al passed on into the auditorium, carrying his jug by the handle. Ian followed, and a moment later the two of them were on the stage, facing the partially-filled hall.

"Have you ever seen her?" Al asked.

"I see her all the time."

"I mean in reality. In person. So to speak, in the flesh."

"Of course not," Ian said. That was the whole point of their being successful, of getting to the White House. They would see her really, not just the TV image; it would no longer be a fantasy—it would be true.

I SAW her once," Al said. "I had just put the lot down, Jalopy Jungle No. 3, on a main business avenue in Shreveport, La. It was early in the morning, about eight o'clock. I saw official cars coming; naturally I thought it was the police—I started to take off. But it wasn't. It was a motorcade, with Nicole in it, going to dedicate a new apartment building, the largest yet."

"Yes," Ian said. "The Paul Bunyon." The football team from Abraham Lincoln played annually against its team, and always lost. The Paul Bunyon had over ten thousand residents, and all of them came from administrative-class backgrounds; it was an exclusive apartment building of active Party members, with uniquely high monthly payments.

"You should have seen her," Al said thoughtfully as he sat facing the audience, his jug on his lap. He tapped the papoola with his foot; it had taken up a position beneath his chair, out of sight. "Yes," he murmured, "you really should. It's not the same as on TV, Ian. Not at all."

Ian nodded. He had begun to feel apprehensive, now; in a few minutes they would be introduced. Their test had come.

Seeing him gripping his jug tautly, Al said, "Shall I use the papoola or not? It's up to you." He raised a quizzical brow.

Ian said, "Use it."

"Okay," Al said, reaching his hand inside his coat. Leisurely, he stroked the controls. And, from beneath his chair, the papoola rolled forth, its antennae twitching drolly, its eyes crossing and uncrossing.

At once the audience became

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alert; people leaned forward to see, some of them chuckling with delight.

"Look," a man said excitedly. It was old Joe Purd, as eager as a child. "It's the papoola!"

A woman rose to her feet to see more clearly, and Ian thought to himself, *Everyone loves the papoola.* We'll win, whether we can play the jug or not. And then what? Will meeting Nicole make us even more unhappy than we are? Is that what we'll get out of this: hopeless, massive discontent? An ache, a longing which can never be satisfied in this world?

It was too late to back out, now. The doors of the auditorium had shut and Don Klugman was rising from his chair, rapping for order. "Okay, folks," he said into his lapel microphone. "We're going to have a little display of some talent, right now, for everyone's enjoyment. As you see on your programs, first in order is a fine group, the Duncan Brothers and their Classical Jugs with a medly of Bach and Handel tunes that ought to set your feet tapping." He beamed archly at Ian and Al, as if saying, How does that suit you as an intro?

Al paid no attention; he manipulated his controls and gazed thoughtfully at the audience, then at last picked up his jug, glanced at Ian and then tapped his foot. "The Little Fugue in G Minor" opened their medly, and Al began to blow on the jug, sending forth the lively theme.

Bum, bum, bum. Bum-bum bum-bum bum bum de bum. DE bum, DE bum, de de-de bum . . . His cheeks puffed out red and swollen as he blew.

The papoola wandered across the stage, then lowered itself, by a series of gangly, foolish motions, into the first row of the audience. It had begun to go to work.

THE news posted on the communal bulletin board outside the cafeteria of the Abraham Lincoln that the Duncan Brothers had been chosen by the talent scout to perform at the White House astounded Edgar Stone. He read the announcement again and again, wondering how the little nervous, cringing man had managed to do it.

There's been cheating, Stone said to himself. Just as I passed him on his political tests . . . he's got somebody else to falsify a few results for him along the talent line. He himself had heard the jugs; he had been present at that program, and the Duncan Brothers, Classical Jugs, were simply not that good. They were *good,* admittedly : . . but intuitively he knew that more was involved.

Deep inside him he felt anger, a resentment that he had falsi-

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fied Duncan's test-score. I put him on the road to success, Stone realized; I saved him. And now he's on his way to the White House.

No wonder Duncan did so poorly on his political test, Stone said to himself. He was busy practicing on his jug; he has no time for the commonplace realities which the rest of us have to cope with. It must be great to be an artist, Stone thought with bitterness. You're exempt from all the rules, you can do as you like.

He sure made a fool out of me, Stone realized.

Striding down the second floor hall, Stone arrived at the office of the building sky pilot; he rang the bell and the door opened, showing him the sight of the sky pilot deep in work at his desk, his face wrinkled with fatigue. "Um, father," Stone said, "I'd like to confess. Can you spare a few minutes? It's very urgently on my mind, my sins I mean."

Rubbing his forehead, Patrick Doyle nodded. "Jeez," he murmured. "It either rains or it pours; I've had ten residents in today so far, using the confessionator. Go ahead." He pointed to the alcove which opened onto his office. "Sit down and plug yourself in. I'll be listening while I fill out these 4-10 forms from Boise."

Filled with wrathful indignation, his hands trembling, Edgar Stone attached the electrodes of the confessionator to the correct spots of his scalp, and then, picking up the microphone, began to confess. The tape-drums of the machine turned as he spoke. "Moved by a false pity," he said, "I infracted a rule of the building. But mainly I am concerned not with the act itself but with the motives behind it; the act merely is the outgrowth of a false attitude toward my fellow residents. This person, my neighbor Mr. Duncan, did poorly in his recent *relpol* test and I foresaw him being evicted from Abraham Lincoln. I identified with him because subconsciously I regard myself as a failure, both as a resident of this building and as a man, so I falsified his score to indicate that he had passed. Obviously, a new *relpol* test will have to be given to Mr. Duncan and the one which I scored will have to be voided." He eyed the sky pilot, but there was no reaction.

That will take care of Ian Duncan and his Classical Jug, Stone said to himself.

By now the confessionator had analyzed his confession; it popped a card out, and Doyle rose to his feet wearily to receive it. After a careful study he glanced up. "Mr. Stone," he said, "the view expressed here is that your confession is no confession. What do you really have on your mind? Go back and begin all over; you

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haven't probed down deeply enough and brought up the genuine material. And I suggest you start out by confessing that you misconfessed consciously and deliberately."

"No such thing," Stone said, but his voice—even to him—sounded feeble. "Perhaps I could discuss this with you informally. I did falsify Ian Duncan's test score. Now, maybe my motives for doing it—"

Doyle interrupted, "Aren't you jealous of Duncan now? What with his success with the jug, White House-ward?"

There was silence.

"This could be," Stone admitted at last. "But it doesn't change the fact that by all rights Ian Duncan shouldn't be living here; he should be evicted my motives notwithstanding. Look it up in the Communal Apartment-building Code. I know there's a section covering a situation like this."

"But you can't get out of here," the sky pilot said, "without confessing; you have to satisfy the machine. You're attempting to force eviction of a neighbor to fulfill your own emotional needs. Confess that, and then perhaps we can discuss the code ruling as it pertains to Duncan."

Stone groaned and once more attached the electrodes to his scalp. "All right," he grated. "I hate Ian Duncan because he's artistically gifted and I'm not. I'm willing to be examined by a twelve-resident jury of my neighbors to see what the penalty for my sin is—but I insist that Duncan be given another *relpol* test! I won't give up on this; he has no right to be living here among us. It's morally and legally *wrong*."

"At least you're being honest, now," Doyle said.

"Actually," Stone said, "I enjoy jug band playing; I liked their music, the other night. But I have to act in what I believe to be the communal interest."

The confessionator, it seemed to him, snorted in derision as it popped a second card. But perhaps it was only his imagination.

"You're just getting yourself deeper," Doyle said, reading the card. "Look at this." He passed the card to Stone. "Your mind is a riot of confused, ambivalent motives. When was the last time you confessed?"

Flushing, Stone mumbled, "I think last August. Pepe Jones was the sky pilot, then."

"A lot of work will have to be done with you," Doyle said, lighting a cigarette and leaning back in his chair.

THE opening number on their White House performance, they had decided after much discussion and argument, would be the Bach "Chaconne in D." Al had always liked it, despite the difficulties involved, the double-

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stopping and all. Even thinking about the "Chaconne" made Ian nervous. He wished, now that it had been decided, that he had held out for the simpler "Fifth Unaccompanied Cello Suite." But too late now. Al had sent the information on to the White House A & R—artists and repertory—secretary, Harold Slezak.

Al said, "Don't worry; you've got the number two jug in this. Do you mind being second jug to me?"

"No," Ian said. It was a relief, actually; Al had the far more difficult part.

Outside the perimeter of Jalopy Jungle No. 3 the papoola moved, criss-crossing the sidewalk in its gliding, quiet pursuit of a sales prospect. It was only ten in the morning and no one worth collaring had come along, as yet. Today the lot had set down in the hilly section of Oakland, California, among the winding tree-lined streets of the better residential section. Across from the lot, Ian could see the Joe Louis, a peculiarly-shaped but striking apartment building of a thousand units, mostly occupied by well-to-do Negroes. The building, in the morning sun, looked especially neat and cared for. A guard, with badge and gun, patrolled the entrance, stopping anyone who did not live there from entering.

"Slezak has to okay the program," Al reminded him. "Maybe Nicole won't want to hear the 'Chaconne'; she's got very specialized tastes and they're changing all the time."

In his mind Ian saw Nicole, propped up in her enormous bed, in her pink, frilly robe, her breakfast on a tray beside her as she scanned the program schedules presented to her for her approval. Already she's heard about us, he thought. *She knows of our existence.* In that case, we really do exist. Like a child that has to have its mother watching what it does; we're brought into being, validated consensually, by Nicole's gaze.

And when she takes her eye off us, he thought, then what? What happens to us afterward? Do we disintegrate, sink back into oblivion?

Back, he thought, into random, unformed atoms. Where we came from . . . the world of nonbeing. The world we've been in all our lives, up until now.

"And," Al said, "she may ask us for an encore. She may even request a particular favorite. I've researched it, and it seems she sometimes asks to hear Schumann's 'The Happy Farmer.' Got that in mind? We'd better work up 'The Happy Farmer,' just in case." He blew a few toots on his jug, thoughtfully.

"I can't do it," Ian said abruptly. "I can't go on. It means too

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much to me. Something will go wrong; we won't please her and they'll boot us out. And we'll never be able to forget it."

"Look," Al began. "We have the papoola. And that gives us —" He broke off. A tall, stoop-shouldered elderly man in an expensive natural-fiber blue pinstripe suit was coming up the sidewalk. "My god, it's Luke himself," Al said. He looked frightened. "I've only seen him twice before in my life. Something must be wrong."

"Better reel in the papoola," Ian said. The papoola had begun to move toward Loony Luke.

With a bewildered expression on his face Al said, "I can't." He fiddled desperately with the controls at his waist. "It won't respond."

The papoola reached Luke, and Luke bent down, picked it up and continued on toward the lot, the papoola under his arm.

"He's taken precedence over me," Al said. He looked at his brother numbly.

THE door of the little structure opened and Loony Luke entered. "We received a report that you've been using this on your own time, for purposes of your own," he said to Al, his voice low and gravelly. "You were told not to do that; the papoolas belong to the lots, not to the operators."

Al said, "Aw, come on, Luke."

"You ought to be fired," Luke said, "but you're a good salesman so I'll keep you on. Meanwhile, you'll have to make your quota without help." Tightening his grip on the papoola, he started back out. "My time is valuable; I have to go." He saw Al's jug. "That's not a musical instrument; it's a thing to put whiskey in."

Al said, "Listen, Luke, this is publicity. Performing for Nicole means that the network of jalopy jungles will gain prestige; got it?"

"I don't want prestige," Luke said, pausing at the door. "There's no catering to Nicole Thibodeaux by me; let her run her society the way she wants and I'll run the jungles the way I want. She leaves me alone and I leave her alone and that's fine with me. Don't mess it up. Tell Slezak you can't appear and forget about it; no grown man in his right senses would be hooting into an empty bottle anyhow."

"That's where you're wrong," Al said. "Art can be found in the most mundane daily walks of life, like in these jugs for instance."

Luke, picking his teeth with a silver toothpick, said, "Now you don't have a papoola to soften the First Family up for you. Better think about that . . . do you really expect to make it without the papoola?"

After a pause Al said to Ian,

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"He's right. The papoola did it for us. But—hell, let's go on anyhow."

"You've got guts," Luke said. "But no sense. Still, I have to admire you. I can see why you've been a top notch salesman for the organization; you don't give up. Take the papoola the night you perform at the White House and then return it to me the next morning." He tossed the round, bug-like creature to Al; grabbing it, Al hugged it against his chest like a big pillow. "Maybe it would be good publicity for the jungles," Luke said. "But I know this. Nicole doesn't like us. Too many people have slipped out of her hands by means of us; we're a leak in mama's structure and mama knows it." He grinned, showing gold teeth.

Al said, "Thanks, Luke."

"But I'll operate the papoola," Luke said. "By remote. I'm a little more skilled than you; after all, I *built* them."

"Sure," Al said. "I'll have my hands full playing anyhow."

"Yes," Luke said, "you'll need both hands for that bottle."

SOMETHING in Luke's tone made Ian Duncan uneasy. What's he up to? he wondered. But in any case he and his brother had no choice; they had to have the papoola working for them. And no doubt Luke could do a good job of operating it; he had already proved his superiority over Al, just now, and as Luke said, Al would be busy blowing away on his jug. But still—

"Loony Luke," Ian said, "have you ever met Nicole?" It was a sudden thought on his part, an unexpected intuition.

"Sure," Luke said steadily. "Years ago. I had some hand puppets; my Dad and I traveled around putting on puppet shows. We finally played the White House."

"What happened there?" Ian asked.

Luke, after a pause, said, "She didn't care for us. Said something about our puppets being indecent."

And you hate her, Ian realized. You never forgave her. "Were they?" he asked Luke.

"No," Luke answered. "True, one act was a strip show; we had follies girl puppets. But nobody ever objected before. My Dad took it hard but it didn't bother me." His face was impassive.

Al said, "Was Nicole the First Lady that far back?"

"Oh yes," Luke said. "She's been in office for seventy-three years; didn't you know that?"

"It isn't possible," both Al and Ian said, almost together.

"Sure it is," Luke said. "She's a really old woman, now. A grandmother. But she still looks good, I guess. You'll know when you see her."

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Stunned, Ian said, "On TV—"

"Oh yeah," Luke agreed. "On TV she looks around twenty. But look in the history books yourself; figure it out. The facts are all there."

The facts, Ian realized, mean nothing when you can see with your own eyes that she's as young-looking as ever. And we see that every day.

Luke, you're lying, he thought. We know it; we all know it. My brother saw her; Al would have said, if she was really like that. You hate her; that's your motive. Shaken, he turned his back to Luke, not wanting to have anything to do with the man, now. Seventy-three years in office—that would make Nicole almost ninety, now. He shuddered at the idea; he blocked it out of his thoughts. Or at least he tried to.

"Good luck, boys," Luke said, chewing on his toothpick.

IN his sleep Ian Duncan had a terrible dream. A hideous old woman with greenish, wrinkled claws scrabbled at him, whining for him to do something—he did not know what it was because her voice, her words, blurred into indistinction, swallowed by her broken-toothed mouth, lost in the twisting thread of saliva which found its way to her chin. He struggled to free himself . . .

"Chrissake," Al's voice came to him. "Wake up; we have to get the lot moving; we're supposed to be at the White House in three hours."

Nicole, Ian realized as he sat up groggily. It was her I was dreaming about; ancient and withered, but still her. "Okay," he muttered as he rose unsteadily from the cot. "Listen, Al," he said, "suppose she is old, like Loony Luke says? What then? What'll we do?"

"We'll perform," Al said. "Play our jugs."

"But I couldn't live through it," Ian said. "My ability to adjust is just too brittle. This is turning into a nightmare; Luke controls the papoola and Nicole is old—what's the point of our going on? Can't we go back to just seeing her on the TV and maybe once in our lifetime at a great distance like you did in Shreveport? That's good enough for me, now. I want that, the image; okay?"

"No," Al said doggedly. "We have to see this through. Remember, you can always emigrate to Mars."

The lot had already risen, was already moving toward the East Coast and Washington, D.C.

When they landed, Slezak, a rotund, genial little individual, greeted them warmly; he shook hands with them as they walked toward the service entrance of the White House. "Your program

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is ambitious," he bubbled, "but if you can fulfill it, fine with me, with us here, the First Family I mean, and in particular the First Lady herself who is actively enthusiastic about all forms of original artistry. According to your biographical data you two made a thorough study of primitive disc recordings from the early nineteen hundreds, as early as 1920, of jug bands surviving from the U.S. Civil War, so you're authentic juggists except of course you're classical, not folk."

"Yes sir," Al said.

"Could you, however, slip in one folk number?" Slezak asked as they passed the guards at the service entrance and entered the White House, the long, carpeted corridor with its artificial candles set at intervals. "For instance, we suggest 'Rockabye My Sarah Jane.' Do you have that in your repertoire? If not—"

"We have it," Al said shortly. "We'll add it toward the end."

"Fine," Slezak said, prodding them amiably ahead of him. "Now may I ask what this creature you carry is?" He eyed the papoola with something less than enthusiasm. "Is it alive?"

"It's our totem animal," Al said.

"You mean a superstitious charm? A mascot?"

"Exactly," Al said. "With it we assuage anxiety." He patted the papoola's head. "And it's part of our act; it dances while we play. You know, like a monkey."

"Well I'll be darned," Slezak said, his enthusiasm returning. "I see, now. Nicole will be delighted; she loves soft, furry things." He held a door open ahead of them.

And there she sat.

HOW could Luke have been so wrong? Ian thought. She was even lovelier than on TV, and much more distinct; that was the main difference, the fabulous authenticity of her appearance, its reality to the senses. The senses knew the difference. Here she sat, in faded blue-cotton trousers, moccasins on her feet, a carelessly-buttoned white shirt through which he could see—or imagined he could see—her tanned, smooth skin . . . how informal she was, Ian thought. Lacking in pretense or show. Her hair cut short, exposing her beautifully-formed neck and ears. And, he thought, so darn young. She did not look even twenty. And the vitality. The TV could not catch that, the delicate glow of color and line all about her.

"Nicky," Slezak said, "these are the classical juggists."

She glanced up, sideways; she had been reading a newspaper. Now she smiled. "Good morning," she said. "Did you have breakfast? We could serve you some Canadian bacon and but-

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terhorns and coffee if you want." Her voice, oddly, did not seem to come from her; it materialized from the upper part of the room, almost at the ceiling. Looking that way, Ian saw a series of speakers and he realized that a glass barrier separated Nicole from them, a security measure to protect her. He felt disappointed and yet he understood why it was necessary. If anything happened to her—

"We ate, Mrs. Thibodeaux," Al said. "Thanks." He, too, was glancing up at the speakers.

We ate Mrs. Thibodeaux, Ian thought crazily. Isn't it actually the other way around? Doesn't she, sitting here in her blue-cotton pants and shirt, doesn't she devour *us?*

Now the President, Taufic Negal, a slender, dapper, dark man, entered behind Nicole, and she lifted her face up to him and said, "Look, Taffy, they have one of those papoolas with them—won't that be fun?"

"Yes," the President said, smiling, standing beside his wife.

"Could I see it?" Nicole asked Al. "Let it come here." She made a signal, and the glass wall began to lift.

Al dropped the papoola and it scuttled toward Nicole, beneath the raised security barrier; it hopped up, and all at once Nicole held it in her strong hands, gazing down at it intently.

"Heck," she said, "it's not alive; it's just a toy."

"None survived," Al said. "As far as we know. But this is an authentic model, based on remains found on Mars." He stepped toward her—

THE glass barrier settled in place. Al was cut off from the papoola and he stood gaping foolishly, seemingly very upset. Then, as if by instinct, he touched the controls at his waist. Nothing happened for a time and then, at last, the papoola stirred. It slid from Nicole's hands and hopped back to the floor. Nicole exclaimed in amazement, her eyes bright.

"Do you want it, dear?" her husband asked. "We can undoubtedly get you one, even several."

"What does it do?" Nicole asked Al.

Slezak bubbled, "It dances, ma'am, when they play; it has rhythm in its bones—correct, Mr. Duncan? Maybe you could play something now, a shorter piece, to show Mrs. Thibodeaux." He rubbed his hands together.

Al and Ian looked at each other.

"S-sure," Al said. "Uh, we could play that little Schubert thing, that arrangement of 'The Trout.' Okay, Ian, get set." He unbuttoned the protective case from his jug, lifted it out and held it awkwardly. Ian did the

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same. "This is Al Duncan, here, at the first jug," Al said. "And beside me is my brother Ian at the second jug, bringing you a concert of classical favorites, beginning with a little Schubert." And then, at a signal from Al, they both began to play.

Bump bump-bump BUMP-BUMP buuump bump, ba-bump-bump bup-bup-bup-bup-bupppp.

Nicole giggled.

We've failed, Ian thought. God, the worst has come about; we're ludicrous. He ceased playing; Al continued on, his cheeks red and swelling with the effort of playing. He seemed unaware that Nicole was holding her hand up to cover her laughter, her amusement at them and their efforts. Al played on, by himself, to the end of the piece, and then he, too, lowered his jug.

"The papoola," Nicole said, as evenly as possible. "It didn't dance. Not one little step—why not?" And again she laughed, unable to stop herself.

Al said woodenly, "I—don't have control of it; it's on remote, right now." To the papoola he said, "You better dance."

"Oh really, this is wonderful," Nicole said. "Look," she said to her husband, "he has to *beg* it to dance. Dance, whatever your name is, papoola-thing from Mars, or rather imitation papoola-thing from Mars." She prodded the papoola with the toe of her mocassin, trying to nudge it into life. "Come on, little synthetic ancient cute creature, all made out of wires. Please."

The papoola leaped at her. It bit her.

Nicole screamed. A sharp *pop* sounded from behind her, and the papoola vanished into particles that swirled. A White House security guard stepped into sight, his rifle in his hands, peering intently at her and at the floating particles; his face was calm but his hands and the rifle quivered. Al began to curse to himself, chanting the words over and over again, the same three or four, unceasingly.

"Luke," he said then, to his brother. "He did it. Revenge. It's the end of us." He looked gray, worn-out. Reflexively he began wrapping his jug up once more, going through the motions step by step.

"You're under arrest," a second White House guard said, appearing behind them and training his gun on the two of them.

"Sure," Al said listlessly, his head nodding, wobbling vacuously. "We had nothing to do with it so arrest us."

Getting to her feet with the assistance of her husband, Nicole walked toward Al and Ian. "Did it bite me because I laughed?" she said in a quiet voice.

Slezak stood mopping his fore-

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head. He said nothing; he merely stared at them sightlessly.

"I'm sorry," Nicole said. "I made it angry, didn't I? It's a shame; we would have enjoyed your act."

"Luke did it," Al said.

"'Luke.'" Nicole studied him. "Loony Luke, you mean. He owns those dreadful jalopy jungles that come and go only a step from illegality. Yes, I know who you mean; I remember him." To her husband she said, "I guess we'd better have him arrested, too."

"Anything you say," her husband said, writing on a pad of paper.

NICOLE said, "This whole jug business . . . it was just a cover-up for an action hostile to us, wasn't it? A crime against the state. We'll have to rethink the entire philosophy of inviting performers here . . . perhaps it's been a mistake. It gives too much access to anyone who has hostile intentions toward us. I'm sorry." She looked sad and pale, now; she folded her arms and stood rocking back and forth, lost in thought.

"Believe me, Nicole," Al began.

Introspectively, she said, "I'm not Nicole; don't call me that. Nicole Thibodeaux died years ago. I'm Kate Rupert, the fourth one to take her place. I'm just an actress who looks enough like the original Nicole to be able to keep this job, and I wish sometimes, when something like this happens, that I didn't have it. I have no real authority. There's a council somewhere that governs . . . I've never even seen them." To her husband she said, "They know about this, don't they?"

"Yes," he said, "they've already been informed."

"You see," she said to Al, "he, even the President, has more actual power than I." She smiled wanly.

Al said, "How many attempts have there been on your life?"

"Six or seven," she said. "All for psychological reasons. Unresolved Oedipal complexes or something like that. I don't really care." She turned to her husband, then. "I really think these two men here—" She pointed at Al and Ian. "They don't seem to know what's going on; maybe they are innocent." To her husband and Slezak and the security guards she said, "Do they have to be destroyed? I don't see why you couldn't just eradicate a part of their memory-cells and let them go. Why wouldn't that do?"

Her husband shrugged. "If you want it that way."

"Yes," she said. "I'd prefer that. It would make my job easier. Take them to the medical center at Bethesda and then let's go on; let's give an audience to the next performers."

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A security guard nudged Ian in the back with his gun. "Down the corridor, please."

"Okay," Ian murmured, gripping his jug. But what happened? he wondered. I don't quite understand. This woman isn't Nicole and even worse there is no Nicole anywhere; there's just the TV image, the illusion, and behind it, behind her, another group entirely rules. A council of some kind. But who are they and how did they get power? Will we ever know? We came so far; we almost seem to know what's really going on. The actuality behind the illusion . . . can't they tell us the rest? What difference would it make now? How—

"Goodbye," Al was saying to him.

"What?" he said, horrified. "Why do you say that? They're going to let us go, aren't they?"

Al said, "We won't remember each other. Take my word for it; we won't be allowed to keep any ties like that. So—" He held out his hand. "So goodbye, Ian. We made it to the White House. You won't remember that either, but it's true; we did do it." He grinned crookedly.

"Move along," the security guard said to them.

Holding their jugs, the two of them moved down the corridor, toward the door and the waiting black medical van beyond.

It was night, and Ian Duncan found himself at a deserted street corner, cold and shivering, blinking in the glaring white light of an urban monorail loading platform. What am I doing here? he asked himself, bewildered. He looked at his wristwatch; it was eight o'clock. I'm supposed to be at the All Souls Meeting, aren't I? he thought dazedly.

I can't miss another one, he realized. Two in a row—it's a terrible fine; it's economic ruin. He began to walk.

The familiar building, Abraham Lincoln with all its network of towers and windows, lay extended ahead; it was not far and he hurried, breathing deeply, trying to keep up a good steady pace. It must be over, he thought. The lights in the great central subsurface auditorium were not lit. Damn it, he breathed in despair.

"All Souls is over?" he said to the doorman as he entered the lobby, his identification held out.

"You're a little confused, Mr. Duncan," the doorman said, putting away his gun. "All Souls was last night; this is Friday."

Something's gone wrong, Ian realized. But he said nothing; he merely nodded and hurried on toward the elevator.

As he emerged from the elevator on his own floor, a door opened and a furtive figure beckoned to him. "Hey, Duncan."

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It was Corley. Warily, because an encounter like this could be disastrous, Ian approached him. "What is it?"

"A rumor," Corley said in a rapid, fear-filled voice. "About your last *relpol* test—some irregularity. They're going to rouse you at five or six a.m. tomorrow morning and spring a surprise quiz on you." He glanced up and down the hall. "Study the late 1980s and the religio-collectivist movements in particular. Got it?"

"Sure," Ian said, with gratitude. "And thanks a lot. Maybe I can do the same—" He broke off, because Corley had hurried back into his own apartment and shut the door; Ian was alone.

Certainly very nice of him, he thought as he walked on. Probably saved my hide, kept me from being forcibly ejected right out of here forever.

When he reached his apartment he made himself comfortable, with all his reference books on the political history of the United States spread out around him. I'll study all night, he decided. Because I have to pass that quiz; I have no choice.

To keep himself awake, he turned on the TV. Presently the warm, familiar being, the presence of the First Lady, flowed into motion and began to fill the room.

". . . and at our musical tonight," she was saying, "we will have a saxophone quartet which will play themes from Wagner's operas, in particular my favorite, 'Die Meistersinger.' I believe we will truly all find this a deeply rewarding and certainly an enriching experience to cherish. And, after that, my husband the President and I have arranged to bring you once again an old favorite of yours, the world renown cellist, Henri LeClercq, in a program of Jerome Kern and Cole Porter." She smiled, and at his pile of reference books, Ian Duncan smiled back.

I WONDER how it would be to play at the White House, he said to himself. To perform before the First Lady. Too bad I never learned to play any kind of musical instrument. I can't act, write poems, dance or sing—nothing. So what hope is there for me? Now, if I had come from a musical family, if I had had a father or brothers to teach me how . . .

Glumly, he scratched a few notes on the rise of the French Christian Fascist Party of 1975. And then, drawn as always to the TV set, he put his pen down and turned to face the set. Nicole was now exhibiting a piece of Delft tile which she had picked up, she explained, in a little shop in Vermont. What lovely clear colors it had . . . he watched, fascinated, as her strong, slim fingers ca-

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ressed the shiny surface of the baked enamel tile.

"See the tile," Nicole was murmuring in her husky voice. "Don't you wish you had a tile like that? Isn't it lovely?"

"Yes," Ian Duncan said.

"How many of you would like someday to see such a tile?" Nicole asked. "Raise your hands."

Ian raised his hand hopefully.

"Oh, a whole lot of you," Nicole said, smiling her intimate, radiant smile. "Well, perhaps later we will have another tour of the White House. Would you like that?"

Hopping up and down in his chair, Ian said, "Yes, I'd like that."

On the TV screen she was smiling directly at him, it seemed. And so he smiled back. And then, reluctantly, feeling a great weight descend over him, he at last turned back to his reference books. Back to the harsh realities of his daily, endless life.

Against the window of his apartment something bumped and a voice called at him thinly, "Ian Duncan, I don't have much time."

Whirling, he saw outside in the night darkness a shape drifting, an egg-like construction that hovered. Within it a man waved at him energetically, still calling. The egg gave off a dull *putt-putt* noise, its jets idling as the man kicked open the hatch of the vehicle and then lifted himself out.

ARE they after me already on this quiz? Ian Duncan asked himself. He stood up, feeling helpless. So soon . . . I'm not ready, yet.

Angrily, the man in the vehicle spun the jets until their steady white exhaust firing met the surface of the building; the room shuddered and bits of plaster broke away. The window itself collapsed as the heat of the jets crossed it. Through the gap exposed the man yelled once more, trying to attract Ian Duncan's faculties.

"Hey, Duncan! Hurry up! I have your brother already; he's on his way in another ship!" The man, elderly, wearing an expensive natural-fiber blue pinstripe suit, lowered himself with dexterity from the hovering egg-shaped vehicle and dropped feet-first into the room. "We have to get going if we're to make it. You don't remember me? Neither did Al. Boy, I take off my hat to them."

Ian Duncan stared at him, wondering who he was and who Al was and what was happening.

"Mama's psychologists did a good, good job of working you over," the elderly man panted. "That Bethesda—it must be quite a place. I hope they never get me there." He came toward

(Continued on page 91)

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She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen . . . so pliant . . . so yielding . . . so all-enfolding . . . .

the soft woman

By THEODORE L. THOMAS

OWEN SARDULE brushed his fingertips against the silken drapery, and then cupped it in his hands and pressed it to his face. He felt the cloth grow hot under his breath, an he turned his cheek into the warm spot. He straightened reluctantly and continued his inspection of the suite. The rugs were satisfyingly deep beneath his feet. The bed was downy, the sofas yielding, and the chairs comfortingly enfolded his big frame. The room was beautifully furnished, Except for the picture near the French doors. It made a splash of bright colors, garish and harsh to Sardule's eye. He walked to it and read the name in the lower right-hand corner, "Matisse." He lifted the picture from the wall and dropped it in the waste-basket.

Sardule began to unpack, running his hands over the soft linens and cottons and silks as he put them away. He took maMal from its case and placed the doll on the mantlepiece, and then he took it down and rubbed it between his hands. He squeezed it to feel the familiar soft pliancy, and he rubbed it against his lips to smell the faint, bitter odor. He touched it with his tongue and felt the faint stirrings inside him. He placed maMal back on the mantlepiece and stared at it, at the rounded contours of the nude, feminine body, all smooth and flowing and soft and sweet, and blending at the top into the head of a frog.

Sardule finished unpacking and went out on the balcony. The evening air was soft and warm and faintly scented, and for a moment Sardule almost knew why he had come back. The sheer beauty of the island, that must be it. But even as he thought of it he knew it wasn't true. There were other beautiful places in the world, places where a man was far more likely to find a beauti-

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ful woman than here. Yet it had been here that he had found—what was her name?—Torre . . . or Tarra . . . something? Vaguely he remembered. With all the adolescent skirt-liftings behind him, she had been his first conquest in the name of love, the first citadel to yield, the first in a long line of sweet victories. How old had he been? Twenty? Yes, about that. And she had been the same, perhaps a little older, full of soft fire and murmurings and moans. She would be old now, disgusting to look at.

Sardule turned his face up into the soft wind and looked at the stars. There were no clouds, no mists, yet the stars appeared hazy and dim. Sardule shook his head and looked again, but there was no change. He looked down at the ground, and saw that the palm trees and ferns in the formal gardens seemed diffuse and misty. He was about to turn back to his room in annoyance when a flash of movement in the garden caught his eye. A woman walked along the path. He saw her clearly, saw the way her dress pressed against her body as she walked through the soft night air.

SARDULE stared down at her and felt his throat thicken. The roundness, the promise, the raw call of her reached up to him. He stared, unable to breathe. Her full-fleshed body, clothed in clinging white, stood out ice-clear against the misty garden. Hers was not the lithe, athletic body that he despised, not the equally abhorrent big-boned, big-breasted kind. Hers was soft and full and round, and he knew that the sweet smell of her drifted toward him, and he found himself able to breath again.

She reached the far end of the garden. He raised his hand to call to her, but then his instinct took command. This was no way to do it. Here was a prize worthy of his best efforts, and he should run no risk of losing.

He turned and went out the door, almost running. The elevator was not at the floor, so he took the stairs and went through the lobby, ignoring the many "Good evening, Mr. Sardule" that followed him. When he reached the garden she was no longer in sight, but her odor was there, pungent and sweet, and he followed it to the path that led along the shore. He saw her then, walking along the beach, her head back, her black hair trailing softly in the evening breeze. Rapidly he caught up with her, planning his campaign with practiced ease. When he came to her side he said softly, "I have seen many beautiful women, but never anyone to equal the sight of you, walking through the garden."

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She turned her face toward him, and he felt his heart wrench. Her eyes were great and black and far apart, and her lips were full and round and wet. She smiled, and it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. She said, "Thank you," and her voice was soft and husky.

With great effort he took his eyes from her face and walked silently by her side. This was the way to do it with this one. No talk needed here, merely the flattery of his silent adoration. He held himself straight, letting her know that he was acutely aware of her presence by walking slightly turned toward her. After awhile he took her hand and placed it on his arm. They came to where the path turned out to the little peninsula, and he led her into the dim restaurant and seated her at a table in a dark corner. They did not speak during dinner. She smiled her thanks when he helped her, and her breath came quick when he gently leaned against her. Toward the end of the dinner Sardule could no longer eat; they stared into each other's eyes, holding hands beneath the table. They left, and walked quickly back to the hotel and went in the side door and walked up the stairs.

Swiftly he put out the lights, save the dim one on the table by the French doors. His hands shook uncontrollably when he began to undress her; They were no longer the hands of the learned expert. There were no buttons or hooks or straps or zippers, merely an intricate winding of a single piece of diaphanous cloth. He dropped to one knee to finish removing her gown, and she raised her arms and slowly pirouetted before him to help remove the last of the cloth from her hips. He finished, but she continued to turn, looking down at him when she faced him, looking up as her back turned toward him, wetting her lips and making soft moaning sounds deep in her throat.

Sardule stood up and tore off his own clothes. She watched him, no longer turning, but moving her hips slowly back and forth toward him. And just before he finished she ran lightly to the bed and flung herself on it and slowly turned over to him. He followed.

It was morning before the familiar, sweet, sickening smell brought in the others. Sardule lay on the bed, bulging eyes staring, throat choked on a scream forever silenced, hands buried to the wrists in a dripping softness that only vaguely resembled a woman. On the mantlepiece stood a small doll, swathed in a long, thin strip of rotted cloth flecked with black spots of rich, loamy earth. **THE END**

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The trouble with women is, they are always trying to improve themselves. Don't they know that somewhere there is a man who loves them just the (ugh!) way they are.

the Orginorg Way

By JACK SHARKEY

Illustrator FINLAY

HECTOR PAMSON, no different from ninety-nine percent of the Earth's population, was not a rich man. He had, however, two things going for him: 1 Chronic unemployment, and an unquenchable desire to marry Vivian Canfield. The first of these advantages gave him an endless future of leisure time, fully as much as any rich man might desire, possibly more; the second gave his ambition the rose-colored spur it only needed to carry him to the heights.

Vivian, as in most cases of unrequited love, did not know Hector was alive; or, if when she encountered him on the street, she suspected something of the sort, she made no sign. But she did lower her fabulous eyes in a sort of greeting whenever their paths crossed, and that was enough to incite Hector's innards to burn with hot white

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flames of craving. "She's noticed me!" he would tell himself on returning to his rude grass hut outside the perimeter of the sprawling city of Rio de Janeiro. "She may not speak, she may not smile, she may not wave—But she notices me, nonetheless! I'm sure of it."

As a matter of public record, Hector was correct. She *had* noticed him. One could not help but notice a man who had a face as large and colorless as the surface of a honeydew melon, yet whose features were so tiny and close in this convex expanse that they might have been hidden behind a small hamburger bun, albeit this form of nourishment was beyond Hector's economic capacity to provide, had he desired the anonymity. Nor could she, or anyone else, help but observe his lumpy clothing (hand-woven by Hector from pounded palmetto-leaf fiber), his ears that jutted outward from his head like loving-cup handles, his dust-hued hair that lay lifelessly along the curve of his scalp, his short, skinny arms, his long, knuckly fingers, and the distinctive sound made by the calluses of his bare feet on the city sidewalks when he scuffled by.

Hector had no particular ancestry or citizenship to boast of. His parents had been lost in the surf during a seaside holiday when he was but three, and whether they had been Brazilians or simple tourists was a question he had not thought to put to them before their passing. His name he constructed himself at age six from the tag on a passing dog collar and the vague memory that his mother had answered to the name "Pam". Though without formal schooling, he had a knack for tongues, and was proficient in both English and Portuguese, and had a passable acquaintance with a dozen other languages. But his main focal point in life, his greatest interest, and the area of his highest proficiency was plant life.

LIVING, as he did, so near the spreading fingers of untamed green jungle, he could not help but notice how varied were the kinds and colors and shapes of plants, how they grew, bred, bloomed, fruited, and died in the golden warmth and tepid rains of equatorial Brazil. They asked nothing of life but light and water and a place to take root, and Hector himself asked little more, until the day—shortly after his forty-third birthday—when he first set eyes on Vivian Canfield, and knew that a career of relaxed vegetation was no longer enough.

Why he loved her, he did not know. He suspected, from the

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start, that—due to the love he bore the growing things about his hand-made hut at the murky jungle rim—he cared for her because she so reminded him of his leafy companions.

He scratched soaring love-ballads to her in the warm brown soil that carpeted his hut's dim interior, letting his fertile imagination compare her—from top-knot to toenails—to all the lovely growing things within his personal experience. And, for all his uncomeliness of self, he was an accurate objective observer. Vivian Canfield *was* like something seen in a hothouse.

Her long, thick hair was the friendly shade of warm, brown mulch; her slightly protruding eyes—when closed—resembled nothing so much as sap-gorged hibiscus buds; her nose had that graceful curve seen only in the lineaments of a growing banana; her long arms were as sturdy and angular as the arching limbs of the banyan tree; her wide, heavily veined hands might, in the twilight, have passed for splay-ended palm fronds; her torso had the endlessly delightful variety and surprise of a well-noded tree bole; her legs, when she chose to sun herself on the sandy beach before the glazed-brick facade of her hotel, could have been accidentally enbasketed by a near-sighted collector of driftwood; and the like of her feet was seen nowhere but in the slender, moist pit of the mango. "She belongs," Hector nightly breathed into his pillow, "in a jungle!"

How long her sojourn at the hotel would last, he had no way of telling. She might stay out the season. She might sail on the next day's boat. The agonies Hector endured when he contemplated losing her without ever really knowing her are beyond genteel description.

But a girl who spends even a short time in a posh hotel in Rio is not the sort, Hector knew, who would take kindly to an invitation to share a grass hut with a stranger. "Money," he sighed, "calls to money. And, since she is not likely to ever toy with the notion of trying poverty for a change of pace, *I* must be the one whose manner of living turns aside from its erstwhile course: I must become a rich man, a very rich man, and soon, before somebody else snaps her up."

But how?! That was the hitch. Had he even dreamed of such a lovely vision entering his life, when he was still a stripling lad of eight or nine, Hector might have taken a job, and saved his money (All of it; he needed none to survive as it was), gotten together a great attractive bundle of hard cash, and then swept her off her feet

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with an enormous fiscal broom of the stuff. But time was against him. She would, he mourned, depart the tropic shores with no *first* meeting with Hector, even, let alone the planned series of rendezvous his hopeful heart nurtured itself upon.

PURUSING his valiant dream while he was still able to hope, he pored over a thick dictionary in the public library, hoping wildly to find some clue as to how men became financial wizards overnight, as sometimes occurred. But he overshot his page, so frantic was his thumbing, and passed quite beyond the "Financier" definition he sought to a more prosaic one: "Fish". Though the word itself did not halt him, the accompanying illustration did.

It was a full-page, full-color melange of undersea creatures, varying from grampus to clam, from seahorse to starfish, from octopus to eel. And there, at the very bottom of the page, was a sketch of a deep-sea fish, one of those oft-reported but seldom-seen creatures that thrive under umpteen fathoms of cold ocean water, in regions of unimaginable darkness, who have therefore deviated oddly from whatever constitutes fish-norm.

This particular eye-catching animal had—growing from a curved spike on its forehead—a thread of tissue at whose tip (just in front of the fish's broad underslung jaw) was pendant a luminous blob resembling something that would make a strong man retch, but undoubtedly looked tasty as anything to a fish, being worm-shaped, decay-toned and slimy. The thus-appendaged fish, was, in effect, a living chain of things in a single body: Angler, rod, line, bait and consumer all rolled up into one. Pamson stared and stared at this tiny picture, his close-set eyes distending ever so slightly, his tiny mouth pursing in trembling speculation, his small moist nose twitching, and his broad, featureless forehead beaded with a galaxy of twinkling perspiration-beads.

He never turned back to find "Financier". Hector Pamson had had The Idea. The Idea to make money; money to win the broadly veined hand of Vivian Canfield. He turned from the opened pages of the book and fled from the library, making haste to return to his hut and his leafy companions thereat. Hector was going to parlay a green thumb into a Matto Grosso of money.

His first experiment involved the development of a fishing-plant, a choice based partly upon gratitude to the finny inspiration in the illustration and partly upon the fact that the newly

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dawned possibility of actually having his chance to possess Vivian Canfield for his own made it hard to dream up something fancier in his dizzied mind.

For this horticultural tampering, he selected a bamboo copse near his hut, cuttings from a burgeoning liana that snaked its viny way through the nearby treetops, and the barbed thorn of a prickly-stemmed flower that thrived on the iron-rich soil. Then he settled down to the task of enforcing miscegenation among the three, ignoring the thought of the blighted romances and breaking hearts in the surrounding shrubbery.

TRUE to Mendel's laws—or damn-near-indisputable theories, if you prefer—not all the offspring of his unhappy little families turned out as he wished.

Some of the seedlings sprouted into rope-limp rods with stiff iron lines and wooden hooks.

Some were monsters; like the species of tree-climbing bamboo that clutched the hapless bark with steely tendrils.

He even developed a gigantic flower with rod-shaped metal anthers that dangled upside-down like a red velvet chandelier from self-grown vine-chains.

But finally, after splicing and binding and watering and fertilizing and not a little swearing, Hector got a crop of true bamboo poles with vine-lines dangling from their tips, and neat iron hooks dangling from the ends of the vines. (He was most pleased by the hooks, since—to his knowledge—it was the first instance of an organic species growing an inorganic appendage. Hence the name he dubbed his process: Orginorg, the non-Darwinian missing link!)

Success now within his grasp, he left his hut and hurried to the hotel, at last certain enough of the future to beg Vivian to wait for him until the money rolled in. There he received a cruel blow: Vivian Canfield had sailed, just that morning, for New Orleans, where she was to attend the Mardi Gras celebrations with Wilton Sedge, the man she would marry in June of the current year.

Heartsick and dazed, Hector somehow stumbled back into the hinterlands, located his hut, and sat in deep thought until nearly sunset. Then, his plans made, he rose, bid the hut goodbye, gathered what he needed (mostly the seeds of his new hybrid, seeds which grew near the base of the bamboo pole in a stout pod that —had he had more time—Hector had planned to coax into the form of a workable reel), and set off for the coast.

There, by selling those rods he'd already grown to a number of fishermen—he was able to get

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enough money to rent an outrigger canoe, load it to the gunwales with fresh water and dried fish, and start paddling for the U.S.A.

We can skim lightly over the events of the next few weeks; his skirmishes with the immigration authorities, his painful series of anti-tropical-disease shots; his barefoot trek through late-winter snows to the Patent Office in Washington; his lack of money to pay for the patent; his fierce stormings of newspaper offices to get the publicity to get the funds (in the articles Hector occasioned, he had the fortune to be a major campaign issue; timing is everything in success stories); his struggles against the powerful fishing-equipment lobbies in Congress; and his final fantastic success as the owner of the Picaplant Conservatories (a non-sectarian organization). All this has been duly noted in the press and does not bear repetition except as a jog to the reader's memory.

THESE conservatories maintained a lush tropical climate, and the all-in-one rod-line-hooks grew aplenty. This single plant (commercially termed the Piscarex, after Hector himself, since he was undisputed fish king of the nation) sold by the millions to happy anglers everywhere in the country, a feat all the more remarkable when one considers that the new Piscarex went on sale in February, when only the buyers in the southern rim of the continent could get any use out of them. (Ice-fishers found that the line coiled in shock when they tried to immerse it in frigid waters.) Hector Pamson, in person, made speeches in the deep south to push his sales skyward during the first day of his business, but he was secretly scouring the crowds for that one particular face his heart longed to look upon again. He managed, too, to be in New Orleans when the Mardi Gras was celebrated, but the omnipresence of garish costumes and dominoed faces made absolute identification uncertain, although he did startle a few mulch-haired ladies out of their wits by proposing marriage to them before he'd even finished brushing off the confetti from their features. Mardi Gras ended, and the tourists departed, and still Hector had not again found Vivian Canfield. Sorrowfully, he plunged himself into his work, trying to ease his sorrow in a cleansing bath of sweat.

His affinity for knowing the very emotions of plants was still a gift even his most trusted botanists did not possess. He could coax even the most recalcitrant of plants and sprouts to bend to his will, using a judicious mixture of authority and

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sympathy, the same sort of punishment-and-reward system one uses in training a pet. He'd withhold water from a pond-lily until it fairly squeaked in protest, then inundate it with tons of liquid the moment it produced the particular sepal, petal, hue, shape, or whatever he was seeking. His plants knew him on sight, and not a few cowered at his approach down the winding greenhouse paths, though a considerable number of the more sycophantic species (clinging vines and their ilk) positively fawned upon his favor.

Therefore, by late March, Hector was able to announce the development of the Arborlux, a species of tree that—in lieu of buds, leaves or fruit—grew lightbulbs. That is, grey globules on the tip of every twig soaked up sunlight by day, and gave it off by night. The notoriety given his proposed announcement of this discovery to the world brought in enough investors' cash to enable Hector to televise the historic event. "No more electric bills for cities!" he cried, to a rapt nation, his speech having cleverly been inserted in the middle of a big-name variety show that would draw every viewer in the land. "A simple injection of my newly developed hormone: Luminogen, that's all it takes! And short weeks from now, every injected tree will be shedding soft, yellow-green lights that push back the night! No more dark, dingy neighborhoods! No more gloomy, dangerous parks! And, thanks to the fact that avian life cannot slumber well nor thrive except in areas of comparative darkness, no more *pigeons!*" One hundred million throats across the land opened in a concerted cheer, nearly drowning out Hector's final words, "Vivian Canfield, late of Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans, I want you!" (The FCC complained about his use of a public medium for a private message, of benefit only to himself, but he stymied their lawyers with, "Then what's an election speech?", and the matter was hastily hushed up.)

HUNDREDS of "philanthropic" organizations sprang up overnight, after his speech, determined to buy up Hector's hormone and inject it (for a reasonable rate) into the property of each and every tree-owner in the land, and the presidents of six electric corporations went on relief. But no word at all from Vivian Canfield. Detectives Hector had hired checked everywhere, Rio to New Orleans, to all points between. No luck. No girl of that description had been seen since Hector's last view of her. "Keep trying!" raged Hector, sending them all dashing

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out of his office to pick up new expense-account sheets at the front desk.

Hardly were the cities and country lanes of the land glowing nightly with soft, unflickering plant-light, just a few weeks after his TV speech, when Hector Pamson (now fully incorporated, entrusted, and carteled like crazy) brought forth his incredible Herbiphone.

One tiny additive to the Luminogen hormone produced (at a modest rate of one per tree) a different sort of growth from the grey globule it replaced. It became a long black creeper that hated fresh air, and so crept into the nearest domicile and then—at its inner tip—blossomed into a two-segment gourd which—by placing the cupped ends of the banana-shaped segment to ear and mouth, then pressing in proper sequence the ten nodules on the supporting companion gourd—could connect the user to anyone else in the land. In short, a free telephone, with messages transmitted instantly by a synaptic root-system of the trees themselves. (Bell Telephone frantically tried to call this move of his off, but, of course, he could not be contacted by their suddenly antiquated system.)

Then, on the first of June, Hector's desk-gourd rattled, and a long-lost voice that sang against his eardrum like the sundering of rotting timbers whispered, "Hector—This is Vivian. I did not marry Wilton. I could not, after hearing your plea. I would have called sooner, but I was a houseguest in the Sierras, above the timber-line, till just today."

"Tell me where you are, and then stay right there and I will come for you!" he cried ecstatically. She did, and he did.

"Miss Canfield will be right down," said the smiling young woman in the pale white starched gown. "She has a sort of surprise for you." A gnawing apprehension began in Hector's breast, but he hung on bravely, studying the old magazines that lay in profusion in the waiting room of this strange, not-quite-a-hospital edifice wherein Vivian had told him she might be found. He counted off fifteen minutes on his watch, and—

"Hector! Hector Pamson!" gurgled the voice that belonged to the woman that he longed to have belong to him. He dropped the magazine, lurched to his feet, and shrieked in dismay.

"Your face!" he cried. "Your form!" he added. "Your coloring, even!" he finished.

No longer even slightly plant, but all sheer, hot-blooded animal, Vivian Canfield smiled upon him. Her nose was now quite short, snub and proportionate to

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her face; her hair was a radiant mink-shade; her form bulged in newfound bilateral symmetries; and her hands were slender, white and softly rounded things with blood-red fingernails. "I hocked Wilton's engagement ring," she explained toothily, "and came here to lovely myself up! Great improvement, huh?" She did a graceful pirouette to demonstrate her accomplishments, and when it was completed, she saw nothing but the spinning revolving doors of the establishment, marking the tearful exit of a shattered little billionaire.

* * *

She is the last person to ever report seeing Hector Pamson, and despite a search only half-heartedly begun by his greedy board of directors, he was never found, nor his whereabouts, either.

And, in October of that year, all his creations (none of which had any non-deciduous genes in its enforced ancestry) began lazily changing color, turning lovely shades of russet red, frosty gold, and lambent orange, before slowly but surely shedding hooks, lines, bulbs, and phones with wild abandon, leaving the U.S.A. without power, communications, or fish, and in a year, nothing was left but the bison.

There is one vague report of a tropic island out in the thousands of such that make up Oceania which has for its Emperor a tiny-featured white man with a melon-like head, who might possibly be the missing Hector, but this is doubtful, since this Emperor is known to shun anything resembling even the most rudimentary of modern conveniences. **THE END**

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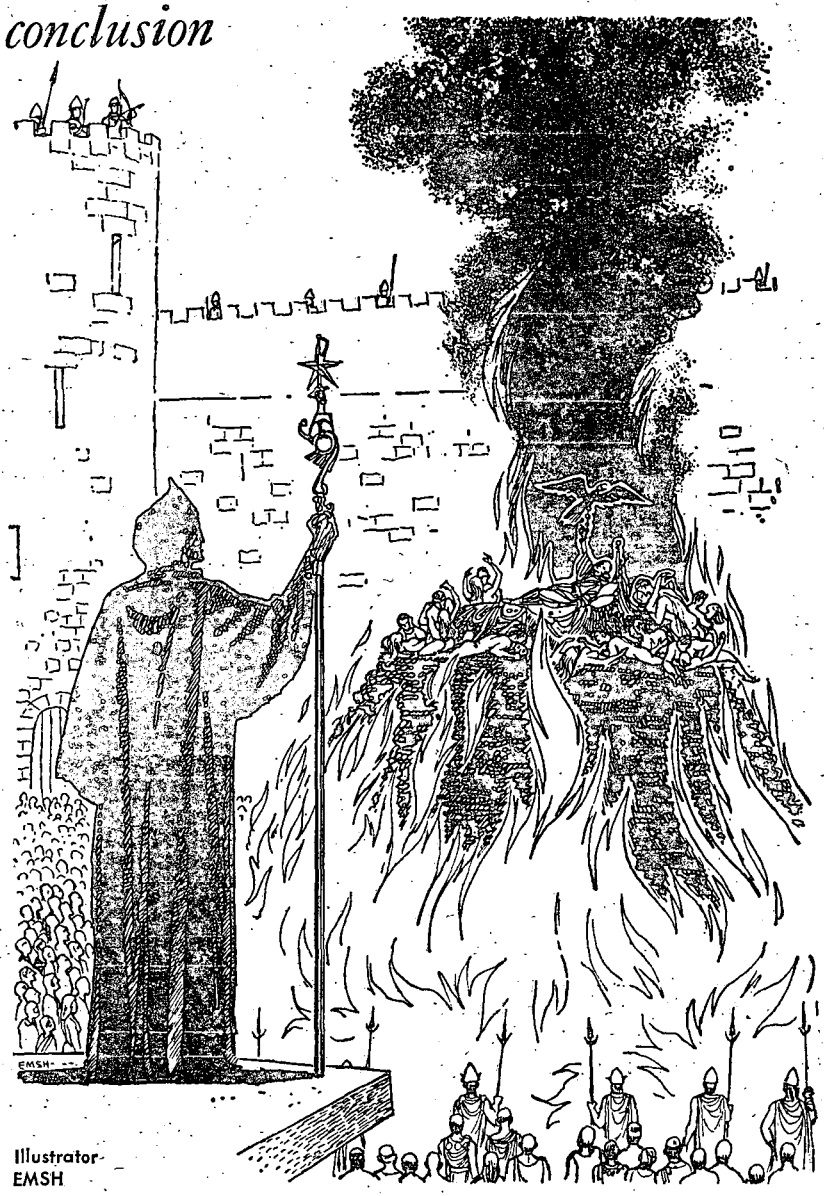

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the Lords of Quarmall

By FRITZ LEIBER and HARRY FISCHER

Synopsis of Part One

The Gray Mouser, that adventuresome swordsman, is hired as bodyguard by Prince Gwaay, ruler of the Lower Levels of Quarmall, a secret underground kingdom supplied with air by great fans which are treadmill-driven by slaves.

At the same time Fafhrd, the Mouser's closest friend and swordmate, is hired as bodyguard and champion by Prince Hasjarl, who is Gwaay's elder brother and rules the Upper Levels of subterranean Quarmall.

Neither the Mouser nor Fafhrd knows that the other is fighting on the opposite side. Each thinks his friend is thousands of miles away.

The brothers Hasjarl and Gwaay are bitterest enemies. Each would happily commit murders innumerable to become next Lord of all Quarmall. Gwaay is handsome and cultivates thought-power: he can move black volcanic rocks merely by looking at them. Hasjarl is ugly and addicted to torture; he has tiny holes in his upper eyelids through which he spies on his enemies while he pretends to sleep.

Hasjarl has two dozen sorcerers whom he uses mostly to send spells at Gwaay which will afflict him with loathesome diseases. Gwaay has eleven sorcerers —in a fit of excitement he brained the twelfth with a thought-driven black jar—and he employs them chiefly to ward off Hasjarl's disease spells. Gwaay sickens alarmingly when these spells break through while Gwaay's elderly sorcerers sleep, but the Mouser rouses the ancients in time.

Hasjarl and Gwaay are held in check by their father Quarmal, Lord of all Quarmall. Quarmal, a vigorous old man, dwells with his soldiers and magicians in the Keep, a fortified hill which is the only part of Quarmall above ground. Quarmal, who has red eyeballs and white irises and is hardly a pleasant parent, distrusts his sons and would be very happy to see them both dead, when his

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heir might be an unborn third child presently carried in the womb of Kewissa, his favorite concubine. But a most strict custom of Quarmall absolutely forbids a father to kill his sons, and Quarmal is a stickler for custom.

Quarmal casts his Horoscope, which foretells the immediate death of the Lord of Quarmall. The old man knows the stars never lie. He summons Flindach, his half-brother and Master of Magicians, and they confer together. Somewhat later Flindach announces to Hasjarl and Gwaay that their father rules no longer and that the body will be cremated next morning in a great ceremony, which by custom both sons must attend.

Aided and abetted by Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, Hasjarl and Gwaay at once begin to war together more openly. Hasjarl has powdered opium and other sleep-inducing drugs dumped into the chutes supplying the Lower Levels with fresh air, but this attack is thwarted when Gwaay reverses the fans.

Fafhrd becomes enamoured of the pretty maid Friska whom he rescues by a trick from Hasjarl's torturers. He hides her in the Ghost Hall, a huge disused room between the Upper and Lower Levels. Hasjarl learns of the trick and turns on Fafhrd, who evades pursuit—for the time-being—in the mazelike tunnels.

Similarly the Mouser finds comfort in the saucy slave-girl Ivivis, whose life Gwaay has threatened.

The Mouser has a magical formula given him by his father-in-sorcery, Sheelba of the Eyeless Face. This formula will blast all sorcerers of Second Rank or lower for an indefinite radius about the casting point. Since all Gwaay's sorcerers claim to be of First Rank and so immnue to the formula, it seems a good idea to use it with the idea of striking down Hasjarl's magicians, who are supposed to be of Second Rank, and Gwaay orders the Mouser to go ahead and cast his Great Spell. Gwaay cries, "The time has come for sorcery and swords!"

But first Gwaay and Hasjarl must attend the cremation ceremony.

THE huge pyre was finally completed, and Brilla heaved a sigh of relief and contentment with the knowledge of work well done. He relaxed his fat massive frame onto a bench against the wall and spoke to one of his companions in a high-pitched feminine voice:

"Such short notice, and at such a time, but the gods are not to be denied and no man can cheat his stars. It is shameful, though, to think that Quarmal will go so poorly attended: only a half dozen Lankhmarts, and Ilthmarix,

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and three Mingols—and one of those blemished. I always told him he should keep a better harem. However the male slaves are in fine fettle and will perhaps make up for the rest. Ah! but it's a fine flame the Lord will have to light his way!" Brilla wagged his head dolefully and snuffling blinked a tear from his piggy eye; he was one of the few who really regretted the passing of Quarmal.

As High Eunuch to the Lord, Brilla's position was a sinecure and besides he had always been fond of Quarmal since he could remember. Once when a small chubby boy Brilla had been rescued from the torments of a group of larger more virile slaves who had freed him at the mere passing-by of Quarmal. It was this small incident, unwotted or long forgot by Quarmal, which had provoked a lifelong devotion in Brilla.

Now only the gods knew what the future held. Today the body of Quarmal would be burnt and what would happen after was better left unpondered, even in the innermost thoughts of a man. Brilla looked once more at his handiwork, the funeral pyre. Achieving it in six short hours, even with hosts of slaves at his command, had taxed his powers. It towered, in the center of the courtyard, even higher than the arch of the great gate thrice the stature of a tall man. It was built in the form of a square pyramid, truncated midway; and the inflammable woods that composed it were completely hid by somber-hued drapes.

A runway was built from the ground across the vasty courtyard to the topmost tier on each of the four sides; and at the top was a sizable square platform. It was here that the litter containing the body of Quarmal would be placed, and here the sacrificial victims be immolated. Only those slaves of proper age and talents were permitted to accompany their Lord on his long journey beyond the stars.

Brilla approved of what he saw and, rubbing his hands, looked about him curiously. It was only on such occasions as this that one realized the immensity of Quarmall, and these occasions were rare; perhaps once in his life a man would see such an event. As far as Brilla could see small bands of slaves were lined, rank on rank, against the walls of the courtyard; even as was his own band of eunuchs and carpenters. There were the craftsmen from the Upper Levels, skilled workmen all in metal and in wood; there were the workers from the fields and vineyards all brown and gnarled from their labors; there were the slaves from the Lower Levels, blinking in the unaccustomed daylight, pallid and curiously deformed; and all

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the rest who served in the bowels of Quarmall, a representative group from each level.

THE size of the turn-out seemed to contradict the dawn's frightening rumors of secret war last night between the Levels, and Brilla felt reassured.

Most important and best placed were the two bands of henchmen of Hasjarl and Gwaay, one group on each side of the pyre. Only the sorcerers of the twin were absent, Brilla noted with a pang of unease, though refusing to speculate why.

High above all this mass of mixed humanity, atop the towering walls, were the ever silent, ever alert guards; standing quietly at their posts, slings dangling ready to hand. Never yet had the walls of Qarmall been stormed and never had a slave once within those close-watched walls passed into the outer world alive.

Brilla was admirably placed to observe all that occurred. To his right, projecting from the wall of the courtyard, was the balcony from which Hasjarl and Gwaay would watch the consuming of their father's body; to his left, likewise projecting, was the platform from which Flindach would direct the rituals. Brilla sat almost next to the door whence the prepared and purified body of Quarmal would be borne for its final fiery cleansing. He wiped the sweat from his flabby jowls with the hem of his under-tunic and wondered how much longer it would be before things started. The sun could not be far from the top of the wall now, and with its first beams the rites began.

Even as he wondered there came the tremendous, muffled vibration of the huge gong. There was a craning of necks and a rustling as many bodies shifted; then silence. On the left balcony the figure of Flindach appeared.

Flindach was cowled with the Cowl of Death and his garments were of heavy woven brocades, somber and dull. At his waist glittered the circular fan-bladed Golden Symbol of Power, which whilst the Chair of Quarmal was vacant, Flindach as High Steward must keep inviolate.

He lifted his arms towards the place where the sun would in a moment appear and intoned the Hymn of Greeting; even as he chanted, the first tawny rays struck into the eyes of those across the courtyard. Again that muffled vibration, which shook the very bones of those closest it, and opposite Flindach, on the other balcony, appeared Gwaay and Hasjarl. Both were garbed alike but for their diadems and scepters. Hasjarl wore a sapphire-jeweled silvern band on his forehead and in his hand was the scepter of the Upper Levels, crested with a clenched fist;

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Gwaay likewise wore the diadem inlaid with rubies and in his hand was his scepter surmounted by a worm, dagger-transfixed. Otherwise the twain were dressed identical in ceremonial robes of darkest red, belted with broad leathern girdles of black; they wore no weapons nor were any other ornaments permissible.

AS they seated themselves upon the high stools provided, Flindach turned towards the gate nearest Brilla and began to chant. His sonorous voice was answered by a hidden chorus and reechoed by certain of the bands in the courtyard. For the third time the monstrous gong was sounded and as the last echoes faded the body of Quarmal, litter-borne, appeared. It was carried by the six Lankhmar slave-girls and followed by the Mingols; this small band were all that remained of the many who had slept in the bed of Quarmal.

But where, Brilla asked himself with a heart-bounding start, was Kewissa the Ilthmarix, the old Lord's favorite? Brilla had ordered the marshalling of the girls himself. She could not—

Slowly through a lane of prostrate bodies the litter progressed towards the pyre. The carcass of Quarmal was propped in a sitting posture, and it swayed in a manner horribly suggestive of life as the slave women staggered under their unaccustomed load. He was garbed in robes of purple silk and his brow bore the golden bands of Quarmall's Lord. Those lean hands, once so active in the practice of necromancy and incantations, were folded stiffly over the Grammarie which had been his bible during life. On his wrist hooded and chained was a great gyrfalcon, and at the feet of its dead master lay his favorite coursing leopard, quiet in the quietness of death. Even as was the falcon hooded so with wax-like lids were the once awesome eyes of Quarmal covered; those eyes which had seen so much of death were now forever dead.

Although Brilla's mind was still agitated about Kewissa, he spoke a word of encouragement to the other girls as they passed, and one of them flung him a wistful smile; they all knew it was an honor to accompany their master into the future, but none of them desired it particularly; however there was little they could do about it except follow directions. Brilla felt sorry for them all; they were so young, had such luscious bodies and were capable of giving so much pleasure to a man, for he had trained them well. But custom must be fulfilled. Yet how then had Kewissa—? Brilla shut off that speculation.

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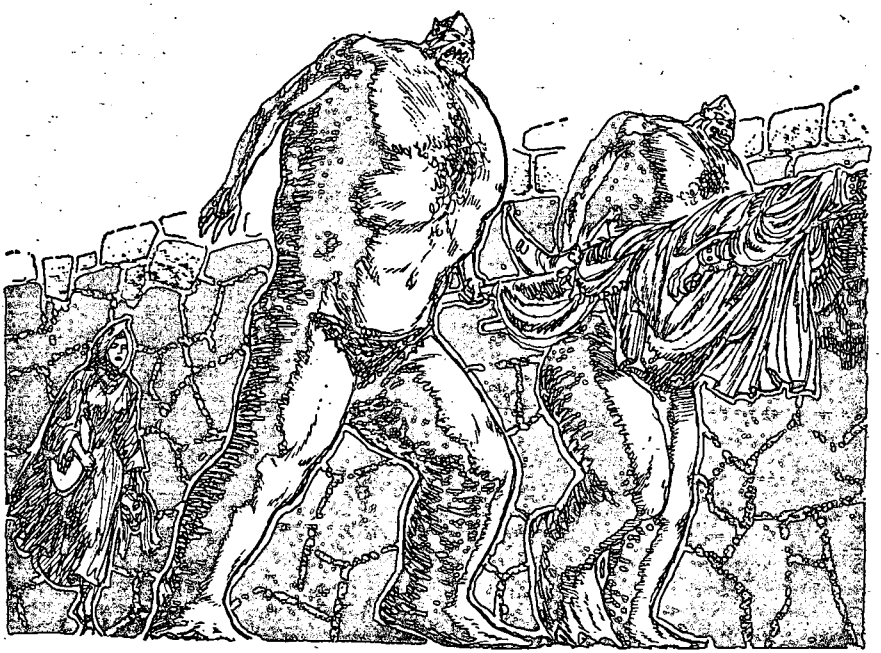
The litter moved on up the ramp. The chanting grew in volume and tempo as the top of the pyre was reached, and the rays of the sun, now full shining into the dead countenance of Quarmal, as the litter turned toward it, reflected from the bright hair and the white skin of the Lankhmar slave-girls, who had with their companions thrown themselves at the feet of Quarmal.

Suddenly Flindach dropped his arms and there was silence. A complete and total silence startling in its contrast to the measured chant and clashing gongs.

Gwaay and Hasjarl sat motionless staring intent at the figure that had once been the Lord of Quarmall.

Flindach again raised his arms and from the gate opposite to that from whence had come the body of Quarmal, there leapt eight men. Each bore a flambeau and was naked but for a purple



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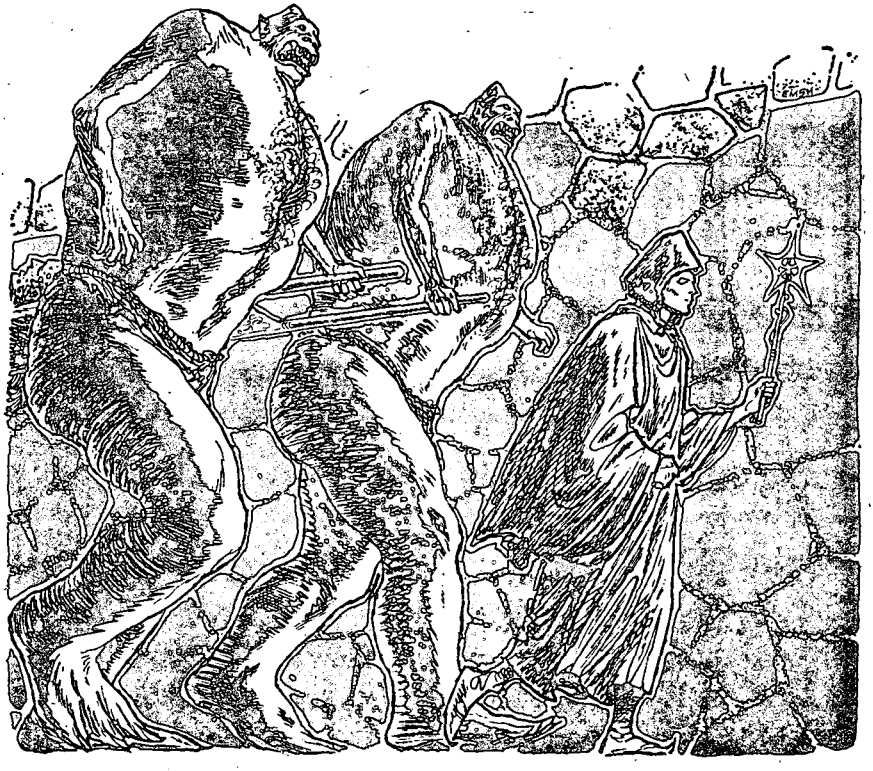
cowl which obscured his face. To the accompaniment of harsh gong notes they ran swiftly to the pyre, two on each side, and thrusting their torches into the prepared wood, cast themselves over the flames they created and clambering up the pyramid embraced the slave-girls wantonly.

Almost at once the flames ate into the resinous and oil-impregnated wood. For a moment through the thick smoke the interlocking writhing forms of the slaves could be perceived, and the lean figure of dead Quarmal staring through closed lids direct into the face of the sun. Then incensed by the heat and acrid fumes the great falcon screamed in vicious anger and wing-flapping rose from the wrist of its master. The chains held fast; but all could see the arm of Quarmal lifted high in a gesture of sublime dismissal before the smoke obscured. The chanting reached crescendo and abruptly ended as



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Flindach gave the sign that the rites were finished.

AS the eager flames swift consumed the pyre and the burden it bore, Hasjarl broke the silence which custom had enjoined. He turned toward Gwaay and fingering the knuckly knob of his scepter and with an evil grin he spoke:

"Ha! Gwaay, it would have been a merry thing to have seen you leching in the flames. Almost as merry as to see our sire gesticulating after death. Go quickly Brother! There's yet a chance to immolate yourself and so win fame and immortality." And he giggled, slobbering.

Gwaay had just made an unapparent sign to a page nearby and the lad was hurrying away. The young Lord of the Lower Levels was in no manner amused by his brother's ill-timed jesting, but with a smile and shrug he replied sarcastically: "I choose to seek death in less painful paths. Yet the idea is a good one; I'll treasure it." Then suddenly in a deeper voice: "It had been better that we were both stillborn than to fritter our lives away in futile hatreds. I'll overlook your dream-dust and your poppy hurricanes, and e'en your noisome sorceries, and make a pact with you, O Hasjarl! By the somber gods who rule under Quarmall's Hill and by the Worm which is my sign I swear that from my hand your life is sacrosanct; with neither spells nor steel nor venoms will I slay thee!" Gwaay rose to his feet as he finished and looked direct at Hasjarl.

Taken unawares, Hasjarl for a second sat in silence, a puzzled expression crossed his face; then a sneer distorted his thin lips and he spat at Gwaay:

"So! You fear me more than e'en I thought. Aye! And rightly so! Yet the blood of yon old cinder runs in both our bodies, and there is a tender spot within me for my brother. Yes, I'll pact with thee, Gwaay! By the Elder Ones who swim in lightless deeps and by the Fist that is my token, I'll swear your life is sacrosanct—until I crush it out!" And with a final evil titter Hasjarl, like a malformed stoat, slid from stool and out of sight.

Gwaay stood quietly listening, gazing at the space where Hasjarl had sat; then, sure his brother was well gone, he slapped his thighs mightily and convulsed with silent laughter gasped, to no one in particular: "Even the wiliest hares are caught in simple snares," and still smiling he turned to watch the dancing flames.

Slowly the variegated groups were herded into the passageways whence they had come and the courtyard was cleared once

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again, except for those slaves and priests whose duties kept them there.

Gwaay remained watching for a time, then he too slipped off the balcony into the inner rooms. And a faint smile yet clung to his mouth-corners as if some jest were lingering in his mind pleasantly.

. . . AND by the blood of that one whom it is death to look upon . . ."

So sonorously invoked the Mouser, as with eyes closed and arms outstretched he cast the rune given him by Sheelba of the Eyeless Face which would destroy all sorcerers of less than First Rank for an undertermined distance around the casting point—surely for a few miles, one might hope, so smiting Hasjarl's warlocks to dust.

Whether his Great Spell worked or not—and in his inmost heart he strongly mistrusted that it would—the Mouser was very pleased with the performance he was giving. He doubted Sheelba himself could have done better. What magnificent deep chest tones!—even Fafhrd had never heard him declaim so.

He wished he could open his eyes for just a moment to note the effect his performance was having on Gwaay's magicians—they'd be staring open-mouthed for all their supercilious boasting, he was sure—but on this point Sheelba's instructions had been adamant: eyes tightly shut while the last sentences of the rune were being recited and the great forbidden words spoken; even the tiniest blink would nullify the Great Spell. Evidently magicians were supposed to be without vanity or curiosity—what a bore!

When the last echoing notes of his voice had ceased to rebound between the domed ceiling and floor, the Mouser slitted open one eye and glanced surreptitiously around him.

One glance and the other eye flew open to fullness. He was too surprised to speak.

And whom he would have spoken to, had he not been too surprised, was also a question.

The long table at the foot of which he stood was empty of occupants. Where but moments before had sat eleven of the very greatest magicians of Quarmall—sorcerers of the First Rank, each had sworn on his black Grammarie—was only space.

The Mouser called softly. It was possible that these provincial fellows had been frightened at the majesty of his dark Lankhmarian delivery and had crawled under the table. But there was no answer.

He spoke louder. Only the ceaseless groan of the fans could be sensed, though hardly more

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noticeable after four days hearing them, than the coursing of his blood. With a shrug the Mouser relaxed into his chair. He murmured to himself, "If those slick-faced old fools run off, what next? Suppose all Gwaay's henchmen flee?"

As he began to plan out in his mind what strategy of airy nothing to adopt if that should come to pass, he glanced somberly at the wide high-backed chair nearest his place, where had sat the boldest-seeming of Gwaay's archimages. There was only a loosely crumpled white loincloth—but in it was what gave the Mouser pause. A small pile of flocculent gray dust was all.

THE Mouser whistled softly between his teeth and raised himself the better to see the rest of the seats. On each of them was the same: a clean loincloth, somewhat crumpled as if it had been worn for a little while, and within the cloth that small heap of grayish powder.

At the other end of the long table, one of the black counters, which had been standing on its edge, slowly rolled off the board of the thought-game and struck the floor with a tiny *tick*. It sounded to the Mouser rather like the last noise in the world.

Very quietly he stood up and silently walked in his ratskin moccasins to the nearest archway, across which he had drawn thick curtains for the Great Spell. He was wondering just what the range of the spell had been, *where* it had stopped, if it had stopped at all. Suppose, for instance, that Sheelba had underestimated its power and it disintegrated not only sorcerers, but . . .

He paused in front of the curtain and gave one last over-shoulder glance. Then he shrugged, adjusted his sword-belt, and grinning far more bravely than he felt, said to no one in particular, "But they assured me that they were the *very* greatest sorcerers."

As he reached toward the curtain, heavy with embroidery, it wavered and shook. He froze, his heart leaping wildly. Then the curtains parted a little and there was thrust in the saucy face of Ivivis, wide-eyed with excited curiosity.

"Did your Great Spell work, Mouser?" she asked him breathlessly.

He let out his own breath in a sigh of relief. "You survived it, at all events," he said and reaching out pulled her against him. Her slim body pressing his felt very good. True, the presence of almost any living being would have been welcome to the Mouser at this moment, but that it should be Ivivis was a bonus he could not help but appreciate.

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"DEAREST," he said sincerely, "I was feeling that I was perchance the last man on Earth. But now—"

"And acting as if I were the last girl, lost a year," she retorted tartly. "This is neither the place nor the time for amorous consolations and intimate pleasantries," she continued, half mistaking his motives and pushing back from him.

"Did you slay Hasjarl's wizards?" she demanded, gazing up with some awe into his eyes.

"I slew *some* sorcerers," the Mouser admitted judiciously. "Just how many is a moot question."

"Where are Gwaay's?" she asked, looking past the Mouser at the empty chairs. "Did he take them all with him?"

"Isn't Gwaay back from his father's funeral yet?" the Mouser countered, evading her question, but as she continued to look into his eyes, he added lightly, "His sorcerers are in some congenial spot . . . I hope."

Ivivis looked at him queerly, pushed past, hurried to the long table, and gazed up and down the chair seats.

"Oh, *Mouser!*" she said reprovingly, but there was real awe in the gaze she shot him.

He shrugged. "They swore to me they were of First Rank," he defended himself.

"Not even a fingerbone or skullshard left," Ivivis said solemnly, peering closely at the nearest tiny gray dust-pile and shaking her head.

"Not even a gallstone," the Mouser echoed harshly. "My rune was dire."

"Not even a tooth," Ivivis re-echoed, rubbing curiously if somewhat callously through the pile. "Nothing to send their mothers."

"Their mothers can have their diapers to fold away with their baby ones," the Mouser said irascibly though somewhat uncomfortably. "Oh Ivivis, sorcerers don't have mothers!"

"But what happens to our Lord Gwaay now his protectors are gone?" Ivivis demanded more practically. "You saw how Hasjarl's sendings struck him last night when they but dozed. And if anything happens to Gwaay, then what happens to us?"

Again the Mouser shrugged. "If my rune reached Hasjarl's twenty-four wizards and blasted them too, then no harm's been done—except to sorcerers, and they all take their chances, sign their death warrants when they speak their first spells—'tiz a dangerous trade.

"In fact," he went on with argumentative enthusiasm, "we've gained. Twenty-four enemies slain at cost of but a dozen—no, eleven total casualties on our

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side—why, that's a bargain any warlord would jump at! Then with the sorcerers all out of the way—except for the Brothers themselves, and Flindach—that warty blotchy one is someone to be reckoned with!—I'll meet and slay this champion of Hasjarl's and we'll carry all before us. And if . . ."

HIS voice trailed off. It had occurred to him to wonder why he himself hadn't been blasted by his own spell. He had never suspected, until now, that he might be a sorcerer of the First Rank—having despite a youthful training in country-sorceries only dabbled in magic since. Perhaps some metaphysical trick or logical fallacy was involved. . . . If a sorcerer casts a rune that midway of the casting blasts *all* sorcerers, *provided the casting be finished,* then does he blast himself, or . . . ? Or perhaps indeed, the Mouser began to think boastfully, he was unknown to himself a mage of the First Rank, or even higher, or—

In the silence of his thinking, he and Ivivis became aware of approaching footsteps, first a multitudinous patter but swiftly a tumult. The grayclad man and the slave-girl had hardly time to exchange a questioning apprehensive look when there burst through the draperies, tearing them down, eight or nine of Gwaay's chiefest henchmen, their faces death-pale, their eyes staring like madmen's. They raced across the chamber and out the opposite archway almost before the Mouser could recover from where he'd dodged out of their way.

But that was not the end of the footsteps. There was a last pair coming down the black corridor and at a strange unequal gallop, like a cripple sprinting, and with a squushy slap at each tread. The Mouser crossed quickly to Ivivis and put an arm around her. He did not himself want to be standing alone at this moment.

Ivivis said, "If your Great Spell missed Hasjarl's sorcerers, and their disease-spells struck through to Gwaay, now undefended . . ."

Her whisper trailed off fearfully as a monstrous figure clad in dark scarlet robes lurched by swift convulsive stages into view. At first the Mouser thought it must be Hasjarl of the Mismated Arms, from what he'd heard of that one. Then he saw that its neck was collared by gray fungus, its right cheek crimson, its left black, its eyes dripping green ichor and its nose spattering clear drops. As the loathy creature took a last great stride into the chamber, its left leg went boneless like a pillar of jelly and its right leg, striking

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down stiffly though with a heel-splash, broke in midshin and the jagged bones thrust through the flesh. Its yellow-crusted red-cracked scurfy hands snatched futilely at the air for support and its right arm brushing its head carried away half the hair on that side.

Ivivis began to mewl and yelp faintly with horror and she clung to the Mouser, who himself felt as if a nightmare were lifting its hooves to trample him and he horror-frozen.

In such manner did Prince Gwaay, Lord of the Lower Levels of Quarmall, come home from his father's funeral, falling in a stenchful, scabrous, ichorous heap upon the torn-down richly-embroidered curtains immediately beneath the pristine-handsome silver statue of himself in the niche above the arch.

THE funeral pyre smouldered for a long time, but of all the inhabitants in that huge and ramified castle-kingdom Brilla the High Eunuch was the only one who watched it out. Then he collected a few representative pinches of ashes to preserve; he kept them with some dim idea that they might perhaps act as some protection, now that the living protector was forever gone.

Yet the fluffy-gritty gray tokens did not much cheer Brilla as he wandered desolately into the inner rooms. He was troubled and eunuchlike be-twittered by thoughts of the war between brothers that must now ensue before Quarmall had again a single master. Oh what a tragedy that Lord Quarmal should have been snatched so sudden by the Fates with no chance to make arrangement for the succession! —though what that arrangement might have been, considering custom's strictures in Quarmall, Brilla could not say. Still, Quarmal had always seemed able to achieve the impossible.

Brilla was troubled too, and rather more acutely, by his guilty-feeling knowledge that Quarmal's concubine Kewissa had evaded the flames. He might be blamed for that, though he could not see where he had omitted any customary precaution. And burning would have been small pain indeed to what the poor girl must suffer now for her transgression. He rather hoped she had slain herself by knife or poison, though that would doom her spirit to eternal wandering in the winds between the stars that make them twinkle.

Brilla realized his steps were taking him to the Harem and he halted a-quake. He might well find Kewissa there and he did not want to be the one to turn her in.

Yet if he stayed in this central

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section of the Keep, he would momently run into Flindach and he knew he would hold back nothing when gimletted by that arch-sorcerer's stern witchy gaze. He would have to remind him of Kewissa's defection.

So Brilla bethought him of an errand that would take him to the nethermost sections of the Keep, just above Hasjarl's realm. There was a storeroom there, his responsibility, which he had not inventoried for a month. Brilla did not like the Dark Levels of Quarmall—it was his pride that he was one of the elite who worked in or at least near sunlight—but now, by reason of his anxieties, the Dark Levels began to seem attractive.

This decision made, Brilla felt slghtly cheered. He set off at once, moving quite swiftly, with a eunuch's peculiar energy, despite his elephantine bulk.

HE reached the storeroom without incident. When he had kindled a torch there, the first thing he saw was a small girl-like woman cowering among the bales of drapery. She wore a lustrous loose yellow robe and had the winsome triangular face, moss-green hair, and bright blue eyes of an Ilthmarix.

"Kewissa," he whispered shudderingly yet with motherly warmth. "Sweet chick . . ."

She ran to him. "Oh Brilla, I'm so frightened," she cried softly as she pressed against his paunch and hid herself in his great-sleeved arms.

"I know, I know," he murmured, making little clucking noises and he smoothed her hair and petted her. "You were always frightened of flames, I remember now. Never mind, Quarmal will forgive when you meet beyond the stars. Look you, little duck, it's a great risk I run, but because you were the old Lord's favorite I cherish you dearly. I carry a painless poison . . . Only a few drops on the tongue . . . then darkness and the windy gulfs . . . A long leap, true, but better far than what Flindach must order when he discovers—"

She pushed back from him. "It was Flindach who commanded me not to follow My Lord to his last hearth!" she revealed wide-eyed and reproachful. "He told me the stars directed otherwise and also that this was Quarmal's dying wish. I doubted and feared Flindach—he with face so hideous and eyes so horridly like My Dear Lord's—yet could not but obey . . . with some small thankfulness, I must confess, dear Brilla."

"But what reason earthly or unearthly . . . ?" Brilla stammered, his mind a-whirl.

Kewissa looked to either side. Then, "I bear Quarmal's quickening seed," she whispered.

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For a bit this only increased Brilla's confusion. How could Quarmal have hoped to get a concubine's child accepted as Lord of All when there were two grown legitimate heirs? Or cared so little for the land's security as to leave alive a bastard? Then it occurred to him—and his heart shook at the thought—that Flindach might be seeking to seize supreme power, using Kewissa's babe and an invented death-wish of Quarmal as his pretext, along with those Quarmal-eyes of his. Palace revolutions were not entirely unknown in Quarmall. Indeed, there was a legend that the present line had generations ago clambered dagger-fisted to power by that route, though it was death to repeat the legend . . .

Kewissa continued, "I stayed hid in the Harem. Flindach said I'd be safe. But then Hasjarl's henchmen came searching, in Flindach's absence and in defiance of all customs and decencies. I fled here."

This continued to make a dreadful sort of sense, Brilla thought. If Hasjarl suspected Flindach's impious snatch at power, he would instinctively strike at him, turning the fraternal strife into a three-sided one involving even—woe of woes! —the sunlit apex of Quarmall, which until this moment had seemed so safe from war's alarums . . .

AT that very instant, as if Brilla's fears had conjured up their fruition, the door of the storeroom opened wide and there loomed in it an uncouth man who seemed the very embodiment of battle's barbarous horrors. He was so tall his head brushed the lintel, his face was handsome yet stern and searching-eyed, his red-gold hair hung tangledly to his shoulders, his garment was a bronze-studded wolfskin tunic; longsword and massy short-handled axe swung from his belt, and on the longest finger of his right hand Brilla's gaze—trained to miss no detail of decor and now fear-sharpened —noted a ring with Hasjarl's clenched-fist sigil.

The eunuch and the girl huddled against each other, quivering.

Having assured himself that these two were all he faced, the newcomer's countenance broke into a smile that might have been reassuring on a smaller man or one less fiercely accoutered. Then Fafhrd said, "Greetings . . . Grandfather. I require only that you and your chick help me find the sunlight and the stables of this benighted realm. Come, we'll plot it out so you may satisfy me with least danger to yourselves." And he swiftly stepped toward them, silently for all his size, his gaze returning with interest to Kew-

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issa as he noted she was not child but woman.

Kewissa felt that and although her heart was a-flutter, piped up bravely, "You dare not rape me! I'm with child by a dead man!"

Fafhrd's smile soured somewhat. Perhaps, he told himself, he should feel complimented that girls started thinking about rape the instant they saw him, still he was a little irked. Did they deem him incapable of civilized seduction because he wore furs and was no dwarf? Oh well, they quickly learned. But what a horrid way to try to daunt him!

Meanwhile tubby-fat Grandfather, who Fafhrd now realized was hardly equipped to be that or father either, said fearfulmincing, "She speaks only the truth, oh Captain. But I will be o'erjoyed to aid you in any . . ."

There were rapid steps in the passage and the harsh slither of steel against stone. Fafhrd turned like a tiger. Two guards in the dark-linked hauberks of Hasjarl were pressing into the room. The fresh-drawn sword of one had scraped the door-side, while a third behind them cried sharply now, "Take the Northern turncoat! Slay him if he shows fight. I'll secure old Quarmal's concubine."

The two guards started to run at Fafhrd, but he counterfeting even more the tiger sprang at them twice as sudden. Graywand coming out of his scabbard swept sideways up, fending off the sword of the foremost even as Fafhrd's foot came crushing down on that one's instep. Then Graywand's hilt crashed backhanded into his jaw, so that he lurched against his fellow. Meanwhile Fafhrd's axe had come into his left hand and at close quarters he stroked it one, two into their brains, then shouldering them off as they fell, he drew back the axe and cast it at the third, so that it lodged in his forehead between the eyes as he turned to see what was amiss, and he dropped down dead.

BUT the footsteps of a fourth and perhaps a fifth could be heard racing away. Fafhrd sprang toward the door with a growl, stopped with a footstamp and returned as swiftly, stabbing a bloody finger at Kewissa cowering into the great bulk of blanching Brilla.

"Old Quarmal's girl? With child by him?" he rapped out and when she nodded rapidly, swallowing hard, he continued, "Then you come with me. Now! The castrado too."

He sheathed Graywand, wrenched his axe from the sergeant's skull, grabbed Kewissa by the upper arm and strode toward the door with a devilish snarling head-wave to Brilla to follow.

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Kewissa cried, "Oh mercy, sir! You'll make me lose the child."

Brilla obeyed, yet twittered as he did, "Kind Captain, we'll be no use to you, only encumber you in your—"

Fafhrd, turning sudden again, spared him one rapid speech, shaking the bloody axe for emphasis: "If you think I don't understand the bargaining value or hostage-worth of even an unborn claimant to a throne, then your skull is as empty of brains as your loins are of seed—and I doubt that's the case. As for you, girl," he added harshly to Kewissa, "if there's anything but bleat under your green ringlets, you know you're safer with a stranger than with Hasjarl's hellions and that better your child miscarry than fall into their hands. Come, I'll carry you." He swept her up. "Follow, eunuch, work those great thighs of yours if you love living."

And he made off down the corridor, Brilla trotting ponderously after and wisely taking great gasping breaths in anticipation of exertions to come. Kewissa laid her arms around Fafhrd's neck and glanced up at him with qualified admiration. He himself now gave vent to two remarks which he'd evidently been saving for an unoccupied moment.

The first, bitterly sarcastic: ". . . if he shows fight!"

The second, self-angry: "Those cursed fans must be deafening me, that I didn't hear 'em coming!"

Forty loping paces down the corridor he passed a ramp leading upward and turned toward a narrower darker corridor.

From just behind, Brilla called softly yet rapidly, penurious of breath, "That ramp led to the stables. Where are you taking us, My Captain?"

"Down!" Fafhrd retorted without pausing in his lope. "Don't panic, I've a hidey-hole for the two of you—and even a girl-mate for little Prince-mother Greenilocks here." Then to Kewissa, gruffly, "You're not the only girl in Quarmall wants rescuing, nor yet the dearest."

THE Mouser, steeling himself for it, knelt and surveyed the noisome heap that was Prince Gwaay. The stench was abominably strong despite the perfumes the Mouser had sprinkled and the incense he had burnt but an hour ago. The Mouser had covered with silken sheets and fur robes all the loathsomeness of Gwaay except for his plague-stricken pillowed-up face. The sole feature of this face that had escaped obvious extreme contagion was the narrow handsome nose, from the end of which there dripped clear fluid, drop by slow drop, like the ticking of a water clock, while from below the

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nose proceeded a continual small nasty retching which was the only reasonably sure sign that Gwaay was not wholly moribund. For a while Gwaay had made faint straining moanings like the whispers of a mute, but now even those had ceased.

The Mouser reflected that it was very difficult indeed to serve a master who could neither speak, write, nor gesticulate—particularly when fighting enemies who now began to seem neither dull nor contemptible. By all counts Gwaay should have died hours since. Presumably only his steely sorcerous will and consuming hatred of Hasjarl kept his spirit from fleeing the horrid tenement that housed it.

The Mouser rose and turned with a questioning shrug toward Ivivis, who sat now at the long table hemming up two hooded black voluminous sorcerer's robes, which she had cut down at the Mouser's direction to fit him and herself. The Mouser had thought that since he now seemed to be Gwaay's sole remaining sorcerer as well as champion, he should be prepared to appear dressed as the former and to boast at least one acolyte.

In answer to the shrug, Ivivis merely wrinkled her nostrils, pinched them with two dainty fingertips, and shrugged back. True, the Mouser thought, the stench was growing stronger despite all his attempts to mask it. He stepped to the table and poured himself a half cup of the thick blood-red wine, which he'd begun unwillingly to relish a little, although he'd learned it was indeed fermented from scarlet toadstools. He took a small swallow and summed up:

"Here's a pretty witch's kettle o' problems. Gwaay's sorcerers blasted—all right, yes, by me, I admit it. His henchmen and soldiery fled—to the lowest loathy dank dim tunnels, I think, or else gone over to Hasjarl. His girls vanished save for you. Even his doctors fearful to come nigh him—the one I dragged here fainting dead away. His slaves useless with dread—only the tread-beasts at the fans keep their heads, and they because they haven't any! No answer to our message to Flindach that we league against Hasjarl. No page to send another message by—and not even a single picket to warn us if Hasjarl assaults."

"You could go over to Hasjarl yourself," Ivivis pointed out.

THE Mouser considered that. "No," he decided, "there's something too fascinating about a forlorn hope like this. I've always wanted to command one. And it's only fun to betray the wealthy and victorious. Yet what strategy can I employ without even a skeleton army?"

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Ivivis frowned. "Gwaay used to say that just as sword-war is but another means of carrying out diplomacy, so sorcery is but another means of carrying out sword-war. Spell-war. So you could try your Great Spell again," she concluded without vast conviction.

"Not I!" the Mouser repudiated. "It never touched Hasjarl's twenty-four or it would have stopped their disease-spells against Gwaay. Either they are of First Rank or else I'm doing the spell backwards—in which case the tunnels would probably collapse on me if I tried it again."

"Then use a different spell," Ivivis suggested brightly. "Raise an army of veritable skeletons. Drive Hasjarl mad, or put a hex on him he stubs his toe at every step. Or turn his soldiers' swords to cheese. Or vanish their bones. Or transmew all his maids to cats and set their tails afire. Or—"

"I'm sorry, Ivivis," the Mouser interposed hurriedly to her mounting enthusiasm. "I would not confess this to another, but . . . that was my only spell. We must depend on wit and weapons alone. Again I ask you, Ivivis, what strategy does a general employ when his left is o'erwhelmed, his right takes flight, and his center is ten times decimated?"

A slight sweet sound like a silver bell chinked once, or a silver string plucked high in the harp, interrupted him. Although so faint, it seemed for a moment to fill the chamber with auditory light. The Mouser and Ivivis gazed around wonderingly and then at the same moment looked up at the silver mask of Gwaay in the niche above the arch before which Gwaay's mortal remains festered silken-wrapped.

The shimmering metal lips of the statua smiled and parted—so far as one might tell in the gloom—and faintly there came Gwaay's brightest voice, saying:

"Your answer: he attacks!"

The Mouser blinked. Ivivis dropped her needle. The statua continued, its eyes seeming to twinkle, "Greetings, hostless captain mine! Greetings, dear girl. I'm sorry my stink offends you—yes, yes, Ivivis, I've observed you pinching your nose at my poor carcass this last hour through—but then the world teems with loathiness. Is that not a black death-adder gliding now through the black robe you stitch?"

With a gasp of horror Ivivis sprang catswift up and aside from the material and brushed frantically at her legs. The statua gave a naturally silver laugh, then quickly said, "Your pardon, gentle girl, I did but jest. My spirits are too high, too

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high!—perchance because my body is so low. Plotting will curb my feyness. Hist now, hist!"

IN Hasjarl's Hall of Sorcery his four-and-twenty wizards stared desperately at a huge magic screen set up parallel to their long table, trying with all their might to make the picture on it come clear. Hasjarl himself, dire in his dark red funeral robes, gazing alternately with open eyes and through the grommeted holes in his upper lids, as if that perchance might make the picture sharper, stutteringly berated them for their clumsiness and at intervals conferred staccato with his military.

The screen was dark gray, the picture appearing on it in pale green witch-light. It stood twelve feet high and eighteen feet long. Each wizard was responsible for a particular square yard of it, projecting on it his share of the clairvoyant picture.

This picture was of Gwaay's Hall of Sorcery, but the best effect achieved so far was a generally blurred image showing the table, the empty chairs, a low mound on the floor, and two figures moving about—these last mere salamander-like blobs with arms and legs attached, so that not even the sex could be determined, if indeed they were human at all or even male and female.

Sometimes a yard of the picture would come clear as a flowerbed on a bright day, but it would always be a yard with neither of the figures in it or anything of more interest than an empty chair. Then Hasjarl would bark sudden for the other wizards to do likewise, or for the successful wizard to trade squares with someone whose square had a figure in it, and the picture would invariably get worse and Hasjarl would screech and spray spittle, and then the picture would go completely bad, swimming everywhere or with squares all jumbled and overlapping like an unsolved puzzle, and the twenty-four sorcerers would have to count off squares and start over again while Hasjarl disciplined them with fearful threats.

Interpretations of the picture by Hasjarl and his aides differed considerably. The absence of Gwaay's sorcerers seemed to be a good thing, until someone suggested they might have been sent to infiltrate Hasjarl's Upper Levels for a close-range thaumaturgic attack. One lieutenant got fearfully tongue-lashed for suggesting the two blob-figures might be demons seen unblurred in their true guise—though even after Hasjarl had discharged his anger, he seemed a little frightened by the idea. The hopeful notion that all Gwaay's sorcerers

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had been wiped out was rejected when it was ascertained that no sorcerous spells had been directed at them recently by Hasjarl or any of his wizards.

ONE of the blob-figures now left the picture entirely and the point of silvery light faded. This touched off further speculation, which was interrupted by the entry of several of Hasjarl's torturers looking rather battered and a dozen of his guards. The guards were surrounding—with naked swords aimed at his chest and back—the figure of an unarmed man in a wolfskin tunic with arms bound tight behind him. He was masked with a red silk eye-holed sack pulled down over his head and hair, and a black robe trailed behind him.

"We've taken the Northerner, Lord Hasjarl!" the leader of the dozen guards reported joyously. "We cornered him in your torture room. He disguised himself as one of those and tried to lie his way through our lines, humped and going on his knees, but his height still betrayed him."

"Good, Yissim!—I'll reward you," Hasjarl approved. "But what of my father's treacherous concubine and the great castrado who were with him when he slew three of your fellows?"

"They were still with him when we glimpsed him near Gwaay's realm and gave chase. We lost 'em when he doubled back to the torture room, but the hunt goes on."

"Find 'em, you were best," Hasjarl ordered grimly, "or the sweets of my reward will be soured entire by the pains of my displeasure." Then to Fafhrd, "So, traitor! Now I will play with you the wrist game—aye, and a hundred others too, until you are wearied of sport."

Fafhrd answered loudly and clearly through his red mask, "I'm no traitor, Hasjarl. I was only tired of your twitching and of your torturing of girls."

There came a sibilant cry from the sorcerers. Turning, Hasjarl saw that one of them had made the low mound on the floor come clear, so that it was clearly seen as a stricken man covered to his pillowed head.

"Closer!" Hasjarl cried—all eagerness, no threat—and perhaps because they were neither startled nor threatened, each wizard did his work perfectly, so that there came green-pale onto the screen Gwaay's face, wide as an oxcart and team, the plagues visible by the huge pustules and crustings and fungoid growths if not by their colors, the eyes like great vats stewing with ichor, the mouth a quaking boghole, while each drop that fell from the nose-tip looked a gallon.

Hasjarl cried thickly, like a man choking with strong drink,

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"Joy, oh joy! My heart will break!"

The screen went black, the room dead silent, and into it from the further archway there came gliding noiselessly through the air a tiny bone-gray shape. It soared on unflapping wings like a hawk searching its prey, high above the swords that struck at it. Then turning in a smooth silent curve, it stooped straight at Hasjarl and evading his hands that snatched at it too late, tapped him on the breast and fell to the floor at his feet.

It was a dart folded from parchment on which lines of characters showed at angles. Nothing more deadly than that.

Hasjarl snatched it up, pulled it cracklingly open, and read aloud:

"Dear Brother. Let us meet on the instant in the Ghost Hall to settle the succession. Bring your four-and-twenty sorcerers. I'll bring one. Bring your champion. I'll bring mine. Bring your henchmen and guards. Bring yourself. I'll be brought. Or perhaps you'd prefer to spend the evening torturing girls. Signed (by direction) Gwaay."

Hasjarl crumpled the parchment in his fist and peering over it thoughtful-evil, rapped out staccato: "We'll go! He means to play on my brotherly pity—that would be sweet. Or else to trap us, but I'll out-trick him!"

Fafhrd called boldly, "You may be able to best your death-rotten brother, oh Hasjarl, but what of his champion?—cunninger than Zobold, more battle-fierce than rogue elephant! Such an one can cut through your cheesy guards as easy as I bested 'em one-to-five in the Keep, and be at your noisy throat! You'll need me!"

Hasjarl thought for a heartbeat, then turning toward Fafhrd said, "I'm not mind-proud. I'll take advice from a dead dog. Bring him with us. Keep him bound, but bring his weapons."

ALONG a wide low tunnel that trended slowly upward and was lit by wall-set torches flaming no bluer-bright than marsh gas and as distant-seeming each from the next as coastal beacons, the Mouser striding swiftly yet most warily led a strange short cortege.

He wore a black robe with peaked black hood that thrown forward would hide his face entirely. Under it he carried at his belt his sword and dagger and also a skin of the tantalizingly bloodred toadstool wine, but in his fingers he bore a thin black wand tipped with a silver star, to remind him that his primary current role was Sorcerer Extraordinary to Gwaay.

Behind him trotted two-breast four of the great-legged tiny-

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headed treadslaves, looking almost like dark walking cones, especially when silhouetted by a torch just passed. They bore between them, each clutching a pole-end in both dwarfish hands, a litter of bloodwood and ebony ornately carved, whereon rested mattressed and covered by furs and silks and richly embroidered fabrics the stenchful helpless flesh and dauntless spirit of the young Lord of the Lower Levels.

Close behind Gwaay's litter followed what seemed a slightly smaller version of the Mouser. It was Ivivis, masquerading as his acolyte. She held a fold of her hood as a sort of windbreak in front of her mouth and nose, and frequently she sniffed a handkerchief steeped in spirits of camphor and ammonia. Under her arm she carried a silver gong in a woolen sack and a strange thin wooden mask in another.

The splayed calloused feet of the treadslaves struck the stony floor with a faint *hrush*, over which came at long regular intervals Gwaay's gargly retching. Other sound there was none.

The walls and low ceiling teemed with pictures, mostly in yellow ocher, of demons, strange beasts, bat-winged girls, and other infernal beauties. Their slow looming and fading was nightmarish, yet gently so. All in all, it was one of the pleasantest journies the Mouser could recall, equal of a trip he had once made by moonlight across the roofs of Lankhmar to hang a wilting wreath on a forgotten tower-top statue of the God of Thieves, and light a small blue fire of brandy to him.

"Attack!" he murmured humorously and wholly to himself. "Forward, my big-foot phalanx! Forward, my terror-striking war-car! Forward, my dainty rear-guard! Forward, my host!"

BRILLA and Kewissa and Friska sat quiet as mice in the Ghost Hall beside the dried-up fountain pool yet near the open door of the chamber that was their appointed hiding place. The girls were whispering together, head leaned to head, yet that was no noisier than the squeaking of mice, nor was the occasional high sigh Brilla let slip.

Beyond the fountain was the great half-open door through which the sole faint light came questing and through which Fafhrd had brought them before doubling back to draw off the pursuit. Some of the cobwebs stretching across it had been torn away by Brilla's ponderous passage.

Taking that door and the one to their hiding place as two opposite corners of the room, the two remaining opposite corners were occupied by a wide black

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archway and a narrow one, each opening on a large section of stony floor raised three steps above the still larger floor-section around the dried-up pool. Elsewhere in the wall were many small doors, all shut, doubtless leading to one-time bed chambers. Over all hung the pale mortared great black slabs of the shallowly domed ceiling. So much their eyes, long accustomed to the darkness, could readily distinguish.

Brilla, who recognized that this place had once housed a harem, was musing melancholically that now it had become a kind of tiniest harem again, with eunuch—himself—and pregnant girl—Kewissa—gossiping with restless high-spirited girl—Friska—who was fretting for the safety of her tall barbarian lover. He had wanted to sweep up a bit and find some draperies, even if rotten ones, to hang and spread, but Friska had pointed out that they mustn't leave clues to their presence.

There came a faint sound through the great door. The girls quit their whispering and Brilla his sighs and musings, and they listened with all their beings. Then more noises came—footsteps and the knock of a sheathed sword against the wall of a tunnel—and they sprang silently up and scurried back into their hiding chamber and silently shut the door behind them, and the Ghost Hall was briefly alone with its ghosts once more.

A helmeted guard in the hauberk of Hasjarl appeared in the great door and stood peering about with arrow nocked to the taut string of a short bow he held crosswise. Then he motioned with his shoulder and came sneaking in followed by three of his fellows and by four slaves holding aloft yellowly flaming torches, which cast the monstrous shadows of the guardsmen across the dusty floor and the shadows of their heads against the curving far wall, as they spied about for signs of trap or ambush.

Some bats swooped about and fled the torchlight through the archways.

THE first guardsman whistled then down the corridor behind him and waved an arm and there came two parties of slaves, who applied themselves each to a side of the great door, so that it groaned and creaked loudly at its hinges, and they pushed it open wide, though one of them leaped convulsively as a spider fell on him from the disturbed cobwebs, or he thought it did.

Then more guards came, each with a torch-slave, and moved about calling softly back and forth, and tried all the shut doors and peered long and suspiciously

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into the black spaces beyond the narrow archway and the wide one, but all returned quite swiftly to form a protective semicircle around the great door and enclosing most of the floor space of the central section of the Ghost Hall.

Then into that shielded space Hasjarl came striding surrounded by his henchmen and followed at heel by his two dozen sorcerers closely ranked. With Hasjarl too came Fafhrd, still arm-bound and wearing his red bag-mask and menaced by the drawn swords of his guards. More torch-slaves came too, so that the Ghost Hall was flaringly lit around the great door, though elsewhere a mixture of glare and black shadow.

Since Hasjarl wasn't speaking, no one else was. Not that the Lord of the Upper Levels was altogether silent—he was coughing constantly, a hacking bark, and spitting gobbets of phlegm into a finely embroidered kerchief. After each small convulsion he would glare suspiciously around him, drooping evilly one pierced eyelid to emphasize his wariness.

Then there was a tiny scurrying and one called, "A rat!" and another loosed an arrow into the shadows around the pool, and Hasjarl demanded loudly why his ferrets had been forgot—and his great hounds too, for that matter, and his owls to protect him against poison-toothed bats Gwaay might launch at him—and swore to flay the right hands of the neglectful ones.

It came again, that swift-traveling rattle of tiny claws on smooth stone, and more arrows were loosed futilely to skitter across the floor, and guards shifted position nervously, and in the midst of all that Fafhrd cried, "Up shields, some of you, and make walls to either side Hasjarl! Have you not thought an arrow might silently wing from either archway and drive through your dear lord's throat and stop his precious coughing forever?"

SEVERAL leaped guiltily to obey that order and Hasjarl did not wave them away and Fafhrd laughed and remarked, "Masking a champion makes him more dreadsome, oh Hasjarl, but tying his hands behind him is not so apt to impress the enemy—and has other drawbacks. If there should come sudden a-rush now that one wilier than Zobold, weightier than mad elephant to tumble and hurl aside your panicky guards—"

"Cut his bonds!" Hasjarl barked and someone began to saw with a dagger behind Fafhrd's back. "But don't give him his sword or axe! Yet hold them ready for him!"

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Fafhrd writhed his shoulders and flexed his great forearms and began to massage them and laughed again through his mask.

Hasjarl fumed and then ordered all the shut doors tried once more. Fafhrd readied himself for action as they came to the one behind which Friska and the two others were hid, for he knew it had no bolt or bar. But it held firm against all shoving. Fafhrd could imagine Brilla's great back braced against it, with the girls perhaps pushing at his stomach, and he smiled under the red silk.

Hasjarl fumed a while longer and cursed his brother for his delay and swore he had intended mercy to his brother's minions and girls, but now no longer. Then one of Hasjarl's henchmen suggested Gwaay's dart-message might have been a ruse to get them out of the way while an attack was launched from below through other tunnels or even by way of the air-shafts, and Hasjarl seized that henchman by the throat and shook him and demanded why, if he had suspected that, he hadn't spoken earlier.

At that moment a gong sounded, high and silver-sweet, and Hasjarl loosed his henchman and looked around wonderingly. Again the silvery gong-note, then through the wider black archway there slowly stepped two monstrous figures each bearing a forward pole of an ornately carved black and red litter.

All of those in the Ghost Hall were familiar with the tread-slaves, but to see them anywhere except on their belts was almost as great and grotesque a wonder as to see them for the first time. It seemed to portend unsettlements of custom and dire upheavals, and so there was much murmuring and some shrinking.

The tread-slaves continued to step ponderously forward and their mates came into view behind them. The four advanced almost to the edge of the raised section of floor and set the litter down and folded their dwarfed arms as well as they could, hooking fingers to fingers across their gigantic chests, and stood motionless.

Then through the same archway there swiftly paced the figure of a rather small sorcerer in black robe and hood that hid his features, and close behind him like his shadow a slightly smaller figure identically clad.

THE Black Sorcerer took his stand to one side of the litter and a little ahead of it, his acolyte behind him to his right, and he lifted alongside his cowl and a wand tipped with glittering silver and said loudly and impressively, "I speak for Gwaay, Master of Demons and Lord of All Quarmall!—as we will prove!"

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The Mouser was using his deepest thaumaturgic voice, which none but himself had ever heard, except for the occasion on which he had blasted Gwaay's sorcerers—and come to think of it that had ended with no one else having heard either. He was of course enjoying himself hugely, marveling greatly at his own audacity.

He paused just long enough, then slowly pointed his wand at the low mound on the litter, threw up his other arm in an imperious gesture, palm forward, and commanded, "On your knees, vermin, all of you, and do obeisance to your sole rightful ruler, Lord Gwaay, at whose name demons blench!"

A few of the foremost fools actually obeyed him—evidently Hasjarl had cowed them all too well. While most of the others in the front rank goggled apprehensively at the muffled figure in the litter—truly, it was an advantage having Gwaay motionless and supine, looking like Death's horridest self: it made him a more mysterious threat.

Searching over their heads from the cavern of his cowl, the Mouser spotted one he guessed to be Hasjarl's champion—gods, he was a whopper, big as Fafhrd!—and knowledgeable in psychology if that red silk bag-mask were his own idea. The Mouser didn't relish the idea of battling such an one, but with luck it wouldn't come to that.

Then there burst through the ranks of the awed guards, whipping them aside with a short lash, a hunch-shouldered figure in dark scarlet robes—Hasjarl at last! and coming to the fore just as the plot demanded.

Hasjarl's ugliness and frenzy surpassed the Mouser's expectations. The Lord of the Upper Levels drew himself up facing the litter and for a suspenseful moment did naught but twitch, stutter, and spray spittle like the veriest idiot. Then suddenly he got his voice and barked most impressively and surely louder than any of his great hounds:

"By right of death—suffered lately or soon—lately by my father, star-smitten and burnt to ash—soon by my impious brother, stricken by my sorceries—and who dare not speak for himself, but must fee charlatans—I, Hasjarl—do proclaim myself—sole Lord of Quarmall—and of all within it—demon or man!"

Then Hasjarl started to turn, most likely to order forward some of his guards to seize Gwaay's party, or perhaps to wave an order to his sorcerers to strike them down magically, but in that instant the Mouser clapped his hands together loudly. At that signal, Ivivis, who'd stepped between him and the lit-

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ter, threw back her cowl and opened her robe and let them fall behind her almost in one continuous gesture—and the sight revealed held everyone spellbound, even Hasjarl, as the Mouser had known it would.

IVIVIS was dressed in a transparent black silk tunic—the merest blackly opal gleaming over her pale flesh and slimly youthful figure—but on her face she wore the white mask of a hag, female yet with mouth a-grin showing fangs and with fiercely staring eyes red-balled and white-irised, as the Mouser had swiftly repainted them at the direction of Gwaay, speaking from his silver statua. Long green hair mixed with white fell from the mask behind Ivivis and some thin strands of it before her shoulders. Upright before her in her right hand she held ritualistically a large pruning knife.

The Mouser pointed straight at Hasjarl, on who the eyes of the mask were already fixed, and he commanded in his deepest voice, "Bring that one here to me, oh Witch-Mother!" and Ivivis stepped swiftly forward.

Hasjarl took a backward step and stared horror-enchanted at his approaching nemesis, all motherly-cannibalistic above, all elfin-maidenly below, with his father's eyes to daunt him and with the cruel knife to suggest judgement upon himself for the girls he had lustingly done to death or lifelong crippledness.

The Mouser knew he had success within his grasp and there remained only the closing of the fingers.

At that instant there sounded from the other end of the chamber a great muffled gong-note deep as Gwaay's had been silvery-high, shuddering the bones by its vibrancy. Then from either side of the narrow black archway at the opposite end of the hall from Gwaay's litter, there rose to the ceiling with a hollow roar twin pillars of white fire, commanding all eyes and shattering the Mouser's spell.

The Mouser's instantest reaction was inwardly to curse such superior stage-management.

Smoke billowed out against the great black squares of the ceiling, the pillars sank to white jets, man high, and there strode forward between them the figure of Flindach in his heavily embroidered robes and with the Golden Symbol of Power at his waist, but with the Cowl of Death thrown back to show his blotched warty face and his eyes like those in Ivivis' mask. The High Steward threw wide his arms in a proud imploring gesture and in his deep and resonant voice that filled the Ghost Hall recited thus:

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"Oh Gwaay! Oh Hasjarl! In the name of your father burnt and beyond the stars, and in the name of your grandmother whose eyes I too bear, think of Quarmall! Think of the security of this your kingdom and of how your wars ravage her. Forego your enmities, abjure your brotherly hates, and cast your lots now to settle the succession —the winner to be Lord Paramount here, the loser instantly to depart with great escort and coffers of treasure and journey across the Mountains of Hunger and the desert and the Sea of the East and live out his life in the Eastern Lands in all comfort and high dignity. Or if not by customary lot, then let your champions battle to the death to decide it—all else to follow the same. Oh Hasjarl, oh Gwaay, I have spoken." And he folded his arms and stood there between the two pale flamy pillars still burning high as he.

FAFHRD had taken advantage of the shocks to seize his sword and axe from the ones holding them nervelessly, and to push forward by Hasjarl as if properly to ward him standing alone and unshielded in front of his men. Now Fafhrd, lightly nudged Hasjarl and whispered through his bag-mask, "Take him up on it, you were best. I'll win your stuffy loathy catacomb kingdom for you—aye, and once rewarded depart from it swifter ever than Gwaay!"

Hasjarl grimaced angrily at him and turning toward Flindach shouted, "*I* am Lord Paramount here, and no need of lots to determine it! Yes, and I have my archimages to strike down any who sorcerously challenge me!—and my great champion to smite to mincemeat any who challenge me with swords!"

Fafhrd threw out his chest and glared about through red-ringed eyeholes to back him up.

The silence that followed Hasjarl's boast was cut as if by keenest knife when a voice came piercingly dulcet from the unstirring low mound on the litter, cornered by its four impassive tread-slaves, or from a point just above it:

"I, Gwaay of the Lower Levels, am Lord Paramount of Quarmall, and not my poor brother there, for whose damned soul I grieve. And I have sorceries have saved my life from the evilest of his sorceries and I have a champion will smite his champion to chaff!"

All were somewhat daunted at that seemingly magical speaking except Hasjarl, who giggled sputteringly, twitching a-main, and then as if he and his brother were children alone in a playroom, cried out, "Liar and squeaker of lies! Effeminate

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boaster! Puny charlatan! *Where* is this great champion of yours? Call him forth! Bid him appear! Oh confess it now, he's but a figment of your dying thoughts! Oh, ho, ho, ho!"

All began to look around wonderingly at that, some thoughtful, some apprehensive. But as no figure appeared, certainly not a warlike one, some of Hasjarl's men began to snigger with him. Others of them took it up.

The Gray Mouser had no wish to risk his skin—not with Hasjarl's champion looking a meaner foe every moment, side-armed with axe like Fafhrd and now apparently even acting as counselor to his lord—perhaps a sort of captain-general behind the curtain, as he was behind Gwaay's— yet the Mouser was almost irresistibly tempted by this opportunity to cap all surprises with a master surprise.

And in that instant there sounded forth again Gwaay's eerie bell-voice, coming not from his vocal cords, for they were rotted away, but created by the force of his deathless will marshalling the unseen atomies of the air:

"From blackest depths, unseen by all, In very center of the Hall—Appear, my champion!"

THAT was too much for the Mouser. Ivivis had reassumed her hooded black robe while Flindach had been speaking, knowing that the terror of her mag-mask and maiden-form was a fleeting thing, and she again stood beside the Mouser as his acolyte. He handed her his wand in one stiff gesture, not looking at her, and lifting his hands to the throat of his robe, he threw it back and his hood and dropped them behind him, and drawing Scalpel whistling from her sheath leaped forward with a heel-stamp to the top of the three steps and crouched glaring with sword raised above head, looking in his gray silks and silver a figure of menace, albeit a rather small one and carrying at his belt a wine-skin as well as a dagger.

Meanwhile Fafhrd, who had been facing Hasjarl to have a last word with him, now ripped off his red bag-mask, whipped Graywand screaming from his sheath, and leaped forward likewise with an intimidating stamp.

Then they saw and recognized each other.

The pause that ensued was to the spectators more testimony to the fearsomeness of each—the one so dreadful-tall, the other metamorphosed from sorcerer. Evidently they daunted each other greatly.

Fafhrd was the first to react, perhaps because there had been something hauntingly familiar to him all along about the man-

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ner and speech of the Black Sorcerer. He started a gargantuan laugh and managed to change it in the nick into a screaming snarl of, "Trickster! Chatterer! Player at magic! Sniffer after spells. Wart! *Little Toad!*"

The Mouser, mayhap the more amazed because he had noted and discounted the resemblance of the masked champion to Fafhrd, now took his comrade's cue —and just in time, for he was about to laugh too—and boomed back, "Boaster! Bumptious brawler! Bumbling fumbler after girls! Oaf! Lout! *Big Feet!*"

The taut spectators thought these taunts a shade mild, but the spiritedness of their delivery more than made up for that.

Fafhrd advanced another stamp, crying, "Oh, I have dreamed of this moment. I will mince you from your thickening toenails to Hisvet's scar!"

The Mouser bounced for his stamp, so as not to lose height going down the steps, and skirled out the while, "All my rages find happy vent. I will gut you of each lie, especially those about your northern travels!"

Then Fafhrd cried, "Remember Ool Hrusp!" and the Mouser responded, "Remember Lithquil!" and they were at it.

NOW for all most of the Quarmallians knew, Lithquil and Ool Hrusp might be and doubtless were places where the two heroes had earlier met in fight, or battlefields where they had warred on opposing sides, or even girls they had fought over. But in actuality Lithquil was the Mad Duke of the city of Ool Hrusp, to humor whom Fafhrd and the Mouser had once staged a most realistic and carefully rehearsed duel lasting a full half hour. So those Quarmallians who anticipated a long and spectacular battle were in no wise disappointed.

First Fafhrd aimed three mighty slashing blows, any one enough to cleave the Mouser in twain, but the Mouser deflected each at the last moment strongly and cunningly with Scalpel, so that they whished an inch above his head, singing the harsh chromatic song of steel on steel.

Next the Mouser thrust thrice at Fafhrd, leaping skimmingly like a flying fish and disengaging his sword each time from Graywand's parry. But Fafhrd always managed to slip his body aside, with nearly incredible swiftness for one so big, and the thin blade would go hurtlessly by him.

This interchange of slash and thrust was but the merest prologue to the duel, which now carried into the area of the dried-up fountain pool and became very wild-seeming indeed, forcing the spectators back more

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than once, while the Mouser improvised by gushing out some of his thick bloodred toadstool wine when they were momentarily pressed body-to-body in a fierce exchange, so that they both appeared sorely wounded.

There were three in the Ghost Hall who took no interest in this seeming masterpiece of duels and hardly watched it. Ivivis was not one of them—she soon threw back her hood, tore off her hag-mask, and came following the fight close, cheering on the Mouser. Nor were they Brilla, Kewissa and Friska—for at the sound of swords the two girls had insisted on opening their door a crack despite the eunuch's solicitous apprehensions and now they were all peering through, head above head, Friska in the midst agonizing at Fafhrd's perils.

Gwaay's eyes were clotted and the lids glued with ichor, and the tendons were dissolved whereby he might have lifted his head. Nor did he seek to explore with his sorcerous senses in the direction of the fight. He clung to existence solely by the thread of his great hatred for his brother, all else of life was to him less than a shadow-show; yet his hate held for him all of life's wonder and sweetness and high excitement—it was enough.

The mirror image of that hate in Hasjarl was at this moment strong enough too to dominate wholly his healthy body's instincts and hungers and all the plots and images in his crackling thoughts. He saw the first stroke of the fight, he saw Gwaay's litter unguarded, and then as if he had seen entire a winning combination of chess and been hypnotized by it, he made his move without another cogitation.

WIDELY circling the fight and moving swiftly in the shadows like a weasel, he mounted the three steps by the wall and headed straight for the litter.

There were no ideas in his mind at all, but there were some shadowy images distortedly seen as from a great distance—one of himself as a tiny child toddling by night along a wall to Gwaay's crib, to scratch him with a pin.

He did not spare a glance for the tread-slaves and it is doubtful if they even saw, or at least took note of him, so rudimentary are their minds.

He leaned eagerly between two of them and curiously surveyed his brother. His nostrils drew in at the stench and his mouth contracted to its tightest sphincter yet still smiled.

He plucked a wide dagger of blued steel from a sheath at his belt and poised it above his brother's face, which by its

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plagues was almost unrecognizable as such. The honed edges of the dagger were tiny hooks directed back from the point.

The sword-clashing below reached one of its climaxes, but Hasjarl did not mark it.

He said softly, "Open your eyes, Brother. I want you to speak once before I slay you."

There was no reply from Gwaay—not a motion, not a whisper, not a bubble of retching.

"Very well," Hasjarl said harshly, "then die a prim shut-mouth," and he drove down the dagger.

It stopped violently a hair's breadth above Gwaay's upper cheek and the muscles of Hasjarl's arm driving it were stabbingly numbed by the jolt they got.

Gwaay did open his eyes then, which was not very pleasant to behold since there was nothing in them but green ichor.

Hasjarl instantly closed his own eyes, but continued to peer down through the holes in his upper lids.

Then he heard Gwaay's voice like a silver mosquito by his ear saying, "You have made a slight oversight, dear brother. You have chosen the wrong weapon. After our father's burning you swore to me my life was sacrosanct—until you killed me by crushing. '—until I crush it out,' you said. The gods hear only our words, Brother, not our intentions. Had you come lugging a boulder, like the curious gnome you are, you might have accomplished your aim."

"Then I'll have you crushed!" Hasjarl retorted angrily, leaning his face closer and almost shouting. "Aye, and I'll sit by and listen to your bones crunch!—what bones you have left! You're as great a fool as I, Gwaay, for you too after our father's funeral promised not to slay me. Aye, and you're a greater fool, for now you've spilled to me your little secret of how you may be slain."

"I swore not to slay you with spells or steel or venom or with my hand," the bright insect voice of Gwaay replied. "Unlike you, I said nothing at all of crushing."

Hasjarl felt a strange tingling in his flesh while in his nostrils there was an acrid odor like that of lightning mingling with the stink of corruption.

Suddenly Gwaay's hands thrust up to the palms out of his overly rich bedclothes. The flesh was shredding from the finger bones which pointed straight up, invokingly.

Hasjarl almost started back, but caught himself. He'd die, he told himself, before he'd cringe from his brother. He was aware of strong forces all about him.

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There was a muffled grating noise and then an odd faintly pattering snowfall on the coverlet and on Hasjarl's neck . . . a thin snowfall of pale gritty stuff . . . grains of mortar . . .

"Yes, you will crush me, dear brother," Gwaay admitted tranquilly. "But if you would know *how* you will crush me, recall my small special powers . . . or else *look up!*"

Hasjarl turned his head, and there was the great black basalt slab big as the litter rushing down, and the one moment of life left Hasjarl was consumed in hearing Gwaay say, "You are wrong again my comrade."

FAFHRD stopped a sword-slash in mid-course when he heard the crash and the Mouser almost nicked him with his rehearsed parry. They lowered their blades and looked, as did all others in the central section of the Ghost Hall.

Where the litter had been was now only the thick basalt slab mortar-streaked with the litter-poles sticking out from under, and above in the ceiling the rectangular white hole whence the slab had been dislodged. The Mouser thought, *That's a larger thing to move by thinking than a checker or jar, yet the same black substance.*

Fafhrd thought, *Why not the whole roof fall?—there's the strangeness.*

Perhaps the greatest wonder of the moment was the four tread-slaves still standing at the four corners, eyes forward, fingers locked across their chests, although the slab had missed them only by inches in its falling.

Then some of Hasjarl's henchmen and sorcerers who had seen their lord sneak to the litter now hurried up to it, but fell back when they beheld how closely the slab approached the floor and marked the tiny rivulet of blood that ran from under it. Their minds quailed at the thought of those brothers who had hated each other so dearly, and now their bodies locked in an obscene interpenetrating and commingling embrace.

Meanwhile Ivivis came running to the Mouser and Friska to Fafhrd to bind up their wounds, and were astonished and mayhap a shade irked to be told there were none. Kewissa and Brilla came too and Fafhrd with one arm around Friska reached out the wine-bloody hand of the other and softly closed it around Kewissa's wrist, smiling at her friendlily.

Then the great muffled gong-note sounded again and the twin pillars of white flame briefly roared to the ceiling to either side of Flindach. They showed by

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their glare that many men had entered by the narrow archway behind Flindach and now stood around him: stout guardsmen from the companies of the Keep with weapons at the ready, and several of his own sorcerers.

AS the flame-pillars swiftly shrank, Flindach imperiously raised hand and resonantly spoke:

"The stars which may not be cheated foretold the doom of the Lord of Quarmall. All of you heard those two—" (He pointed toward the shattered litter) "—proclaim himself Lord of Quarmall. So the stars are twice satisfied. And the gods, who hear our words to each tiniest whisper, and order our fates by them, are content. It remains that I reveal to you the next Lord of Quarmall."

He pointed at Kewiss and intoned, *"The next Lord of Quarmall but one* sleeps and waxes in the womb of her, wife of the Quarmal so lately honored with burnings and immolations and ceremonious rites."

Kewissa shrank and her blue eyes went wide. Then she began to beam.

Flindach continued, "It still remains that I reveal to you *the next Lord of Quarmall,* who shall tutor Queen Kewissa's babe until he arrives at manhood a perfect king and all-wise sorcerer, under whom our buried realm will enjoy perpetual inward peace and outward-raiding prosperity."

Then Flindach reached behind his left shoulder. All thought he purposed to draw forward the Cowl of Death over his head and brows and hideous warty winey cheeks for some still more solemn speaking. But instead he grasped his neck by the short hairs of the nape and drew it upward and forward and his scalp and all his hair with it, and then the skin of his face came off with his scalp as he drew his hand down and to the side, and there was revealed, sweat-gleaming a little, the unblemished face and jutting nose and full mobile smiling lips of Quarmal, while his terrible bloodred white-irised eyes gazed at them all mildly.

"I was forced to visit Limbo for a space," he explained with a solemn yet genial fatherly familiarity, "while others were Lords of Quarmall in my stead and the stars sent down their spears. It was best so, though I lost two sons by it. Only so might our land be saved from ravenous self-war."

He held up for all to see the limp mask with empty lash-fringed eyeholes and purple-blotched left cheek and wart-triangled right. He said, "And now I bid you all honor great and puissant Flindach, the loy-

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alest Master of Magicians king ever had, who lent me his face for a necessary deception and his body to be burned for mine with waxen mask of mine to cover his poor head-front which had sacrificed all. In solemnly supervising my own high flaming obsequies, I honored only Flindach. For him my women burned. This his face, well preserved by my own skills as flayer and swift tanner, will hang forever in place of honor in our halls, whilst the spirit of Flindach holds my chair for me in the Dark World beyond the stars, a lord paramount there until I come and eternally a Hero of Quarmall."

BEFORE any cheering or hailing could be started—which would have taken a little while, since all were much bemused—Fafhrd cried out, "Oh cunningest king, I honor you and your babe here. I' faith, I honor your babe so highly and the Queen who carries him in her womb that I will guard her moment by moment, not moving a pace from her, until I and my small comrade here are well outside Quarmall—say a mile—together with horses for our conveyance and with the treasures promised us by those two late kings." And he gestured as Quarmal had toward the crushed litter.

The Mouser had been about to launch at Quarmal some subtly intimidating remarks about his own skills as a sorcerer in blasting Gwaay's eleven. But now he decided that Fafhrd's words were sufficient and well-spoken, save for the slighting reference to himself, and he held his peace.

Kewissa started to withdraw her hand from Fafhrd's, but he tightened his grip just a little and she looked at him with understanding. In fact, she called brightly to Quarmal, "Oh Lord Husband, this man saved my life and your son's from Hasjarl's fiends in a storeroom of the Keep. I trust him," while Brilla, dabbing tears of joy from his eyes with his undersleeve, seconded her with, "She speaks only nakedest truth, oh my very dear Lord, bare as a newborn babe or new-wed wife."

Quarmal raised his hand a little, reprovingly, as if such speaking were unnecessary and somewhat out of place, and smiling thinly at Fafhrd and the Mouser said, "It shall be as you have spoken. I am neither ungenerous nor unperceptive. Know that it was not altogether by chance that my late sons unbeknown to each other hired you two friends—also mutually unknowing—to be their champions. Furthermore know that I am not altogether unaware of the curiosities of Ningauble of the Seven Eyes or of the spells of Sheelba

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of the Eyeless Face. We grandmaster sorcerers have a— But to speak more were only to kindle the curiosity of the Gods and alert the Trolls and attract the attention of the restless hungry Fates. Enough is enough."

Looking at Quarmal's slitted eyes, the Mouser was glad he had not boasted and even Fafhrd shivered a little.

FAFHRD cracked whip above the four-horse team to set them pulling the high-piled wagon more briskly through this black sticky stretch of road deeply marked with cart tracks and the hoofprints of oxen, a mile from Quarmall. Friska and Ivivis were turned round on the seat beside him to wave as long a farewell as they might to Kewissa and the eunuch Brilla, standing at the roadside with four impassive guardsmen of Quarmall, to whom they had but now been released.

The Gray Mouser, sprawled on his stomach atop the load, waved too, but only with his left hand—in his right he held a cocked crossbow while his eyes searched the trees about for sign of ambush.

Yet the Mouser was not truly apprehensive. He thought that Quarmal would hardly be apt to try any tricks against such a proven warrior and sorcerer as himself—or Fafhrd too, of course. The old Lord had shown himself a most gracious host during the last few hours, plying them with rare wines and loading them with rich gifts beyond what they'd asked or what the Mouser had purloined in advance, and even offering them other girls in addition to Ivivis and Friska—a benison which they'd rejected, with some inward regrets, after noting the glares in the eyes of those two.

As the mucky road curved up a little, the towers of Quarmall came into view above the treetops. The Mouser's gaze drifted to them and he studied the lacy pinnacles thoughtfully, wondering whether he'd ever see them again. Suddenly the whim seized him to return to Quarmall straightway—yes, to slip off the back of the load and run there. What did the outer world hold half so fine as the wonders of that subterranean kingdom?—its mazy mural-pictured tunnelings a man might spend his life tracing . . . its buried delights . . . even its evils beautiful . . . its delicious infinitely varied blacks . . . its hidden fan-driven air. . . . .Yes, suppose he dropped down soundlessly this very moment . . .

There was a flash, a brilliant scintillation from the tallest keep. It priced the Mouser like a goad and he loosed his hold and let himself slide backwards off

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the load. But just at that instant the road turned and grew firm and the trees moved higher, masking the towers, and the Mouser came to himself and grabbed hold again before his feet touched the road and he hung there while the wheels creaked merrily and cold sweat drenched him.

Then the wagon stopped and the Mouser dropped down and took three deep breaths and then hastened forward to where Fafhrd had descended too and was busy with the harness of the horses and their traces.

"Up again, Fafhrd, and whip up!" he cried. "This Quarmal is a cunninger witch than I guessed. If we waste time by the way, I fear for our freedom and our souls!"

"You're telling me?" Fafhrd retorted. "This road winds and there'll be more sticky stretches. Trust a wagon's speed?—pah! We'll uncouple the four horses and taking only simplest victuals and the smallest and most precious of the treasure, gallop across the moor away from Quarmall straight as the crow flies. That way we *should* dodge ambush and outrun ranging pursuit. Friska, Ivivis! Spring to it, all!"

THE END

NOVELTY ACT

(Continued from page 38)

Ian, caught hold of him by the shoulder. "The police are shutting down all my jalopy jungles; I have to beat it to Mars and I'm taking you along with me. Try to pull yourself together; I'm Loony Luke—you don't remember me now but you will after we're all on Mars and you see your brother again. *Come on.*" Luke propelled him toward the gap in the wall of the room, where once had been a window, and toward the vehicle—it was called a jalopy, Ian realized—drifting beyond.

"Okay," Ian said, wondering what he should take with him. What would he need on Mars? Toothbrush, pajamas, a heavy coat? He looked frantically around his apartment, one last look at it. Far off police sirens sounded.

Luke scrambled back into the jalopy, and Ian followed, taking hold of the elderly man's extended hand. The floor of the jalopy crawled with bright orange bug-like creatures whose antennae waved at him. Papoolas, he remembered, or something like

You'll be all right now, the papoolas were thinking. Don't worry; Loony Luke got you away in time, just barely in time. Now just relax.

"Yes," Ian said. He lay back against the side of the jalopy and relaxed; for the first time in many years he felt at peace.

The ship shot upward into the night emptiness and the new planet which lay beyond.

THE END

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They Never Come Back From Whoosh!

By DAVID R. BUNCH

The mordant Mr. Bunch explores the status symbol to its bitter end.

I HAD seen them go in to the tall coal-colored place, but I had never seen one come back. Looking at it from far out, with my little pocko-scope viewer, I noted that soot hung over the building in long shreds and flapping ribbons and beating chunks of carbon like wings of bats, all jigging when the wind blew. And yet, it wasn't a somber structure. Not at all! Bright neons peeped from fluttering pieces of soot and winked on and off in a gay display of color through the black. Little figures danced through neon trickery, and all the signs said COME. Every piece of light, I learned later, was designed to attract people to this giant building called WHOOSH!

And they were going. I saw them go down carrying brief cases—half-successes racing their papers down on foot. And I saw them go down in chrome-encrusted Cadillacs, successes riding the pomp and show of their methods to the tall coal-colored place. And I saw them race in all manner of other ways—men and women straining, with the bones of their intense nerve-bothered faces jutting whitely at the skin, and their eyes slightly upward toward one tall sign that said: DO NOT BE THE LAST TO WHOOSH!

I knew I could not be the first to WHOOSH! And perhaps there was not much immediate danger of my being the last, either. So I took my time and lounged down one day when the sun was all around in the autumn like buckets of poured gold and the flaking of the leaves. And I saw that WHOOSH! was a tall dark shaft that was not touched by the sun's gold, though the black ribbons and wings beat gaily enough and the neons smote at the sunlight in a silly way at noon. So I turned back from half up a tree-

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gay hill, put three good leaves in my pocket, from three trees like good tall friends, loafed in the glade for awhile and then went, paying my respects to a nagging pang of guilt. Something must lie at WHOOSH!, some urgent project needing many men, else why were they all racing so, with their polished or battered brief cases and the sun's gold changing to silver, or polished tin, on the rims of their eye corrections? Some big decision must hinge there, where the neons glanced indifference at sun and leaves. Perhaps I too was needed down there.

WHEN I broke out of the trees and came to the bald place on the land, where the concrete was leveled and polished, whiter and harder than bone, for urgent speeding, I suddenly felt the yen toward WHOOSH! Strangely. Such a smooth fine place to GO! —Though I knew I had started too late to be first, for WHOOSH! had been there a long time, I now was determined not to be any later than I had to be, and I resolved to beat a few people. So I raced them leg to leg while the hours sped, yelled and raised my fists in impotent rage when the arrowing jets whined past, and I cursed for wheels when the wheeled entourages whammed by. I did not quite understand why I now wanted WHOOSH! so badly. But I did want it. Oh strangely.

We raced all the rest of that day toward WHOOSH! That tall place beckoning with its dark fingers was farther away than we on foot had thought it. Those with gas-pushed wheels reached it shortly after noon. Those in the jets had been there a long time of course, some since earliest dawn. I reached it after sundown, slow and by myself, a tired one coming in to no welcome and silent bandstands. Neons once more were dancing and jabbing into the night.

Something pulled me and I went down a chute in the dark. One small blood-colored spot glittered far away at the end of this trough I slid down. When I hit the blood-colored spot, green lights winked on in a basement where a little man sat eating a sandwich of soot held between something glittering and white like porcelain, or something made from snow. He was hollowed into it with his face far as his sooty grimed ears.

"Uhhh!" he grunted and struggled to empty his mouth. "Been expecting you," he finally said. "Heard one man talked to the leaves this afternoon, strolled leisurely in a grassy glade, picked a few reminders of a beauty that has passed and then came here with reluctance. Do you have them, by any chance?"

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I remembered the leaves I had picked, so I pulled them out. "That'll get you a little talk and delay," he said, taking the leaves, "instead of the usual quick-whammo. Very unusual, your behavior. Almost unhuman, by modern yardsticks, and that's a fact.—Besides, it's my eating time, and perhaps that's the real reason why you'll get to wait. They're all waiting and piling up."

"I came to WHOOSH!" I said, "to see what I could see. I didn't come to show my leaf collection. Nor to swap riddle-talk."

"Never mind," he said, "never mind. You'll get to wave your little part like bat wings in a wind. We're building up the upper left of the structure now. You're just in time to go out there. But excuse me! I have to see to my ice."

SO he went away, and I sat on a green stool that was really a black stone cylinder turned green by the lighting. When he came back he explained that the ice he had spoken of was his bath for tonight. "I stay pure," he said, "and clean too, here below the soot. I don't look like people imagine, and I don't get hot. I take ice showers and keep cool with water I've distilled once, boiled twice and frozen three times. I'm not the devil, but I'll push the button to WHOOSH! anybody. Satan's in another department. Evaluation's his game. Of course he gets his work done too. Steadiest man we've ever had. Also the busiest!"

I didn't know what to say.

"My boy," he continued, "I'm sure glad you came. But picking those three leaves before you came here, and loafing around in that grassy glade, set you a little apart. So I'll have to let you watch the operation a bit before you'll be ready to go and do your part out there in that build-up. Oh sure, you'll get to go. You did come to us." I felt my hair get to its feet. I was shaking.

The chunk of basement we sat on became an elevator car and we dropped down two more floors to where the big fans blew and the fires and gases mixed. Other little men, who were carbon copies of my little man, had their furnaces under control. Some were shut down for lunch and some were just stoking their fires for the big night delivery. "We run this place twenty-four hours a day," the little man said, "and wish for twenty-six. We stagger our lunch periods. Gads, but they're really behind on their work here. So many people needing the fire!" Then he started working his job. A hole opened in the wall when he pressed a switch, and the people came on down. I saw surprise in every imaginable form in that interval when the bodies broke from the

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hole and pumped across on a powerful jet of air to where the big fan smacked them into the heat. "As hot as heat can get, that's our standard at WHOOSH! It isn't really enough of what they deserve, these people. But what more can one do?"

"Hey!" I yelled, "I've seen enough."

"You mean you're ready for the chimney?"

"I want to go back. It's so different from what I thought."

He went on working his job and the bodies were whisking across to the blaze. "When they come to WHOOSH! we expect them to mean it," he said. "If you go now you can get in on that build-up about top-high on the left. If you go tomorrow we may have to let you flip your little particles of all-that-remains somewhat nearer the ground."

"I DON'T CARE!"

He was so surprised he almost fouled up the jet belt with a hundred bodies riding. But when he got delivery going again he said, shaking his head, "You're really breaking the pattern. First you pick those leaves and observe nature a bit. You lounge around. Then you walk and run down here and don't ride any wheels or wings. Obviously you're not with it, not by today's standards. Unhuman! almost. And now you don't seem to care if you don't make that top-floor build-up with your death's carbon!—Let's try something funny."

SO he stopped delivery until there was just a trickle of bodies. And then only one. It was a blood-distended man, fat, with a brief case which said a name and a rank in a jumbo enterprise. "Sir," said the little furnace tender of WHOOSH! to this big-wheel jumbo man, "if you'd prefer, you can come back some other time. Just forget business for awhile, let your blood settle a bit and you'll last for some time far hence. But of course I can't promise you that later you'll get in on that carbon build-up high on the left when we whoosh! you. You might have to take a lower floor and flap your final remainders there, ha ha." The jumbo wheel glared chairman-of-the-board and unconsciously reached for top-o'-the-heap cigars. Then he cleared his throat, and his heavy blood-bothered jowls got redder and then white. He didn't say a word, but anyone could see that he, even in the modern structure of death, would be unhappy about accepting a lower rung. So the little man whammowhooshed him and then turned to me.

"Get out!" he yelled. "And don't come back until you're ready to act like you belong here." Then he said confidentially, "Don't tell them where you've

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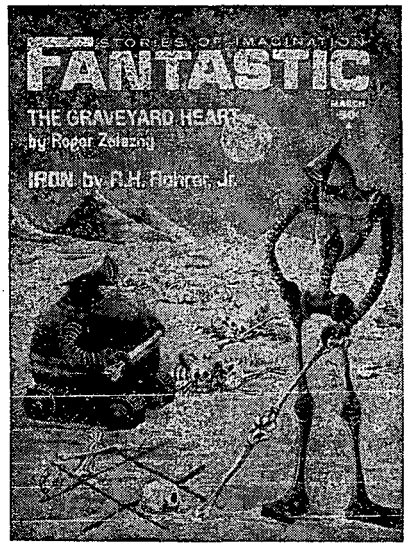
been, ever, because no one ever really comes back from WHOOSH!—the place where greed and speed get whammo-whooshed. That is, no one comes back if he's ever really been here, in his heart.—Oh sure, it's the quickest way to go to hang with the rest of the soulless carbon, to flitter-flutter the long wait in a kind of foreverish grand nothing. It's the surest way to ride in that black monument to this soul-sacked world that hurries down here, about as meaningful as smoke and dust from a burning mountain of coal, about as beautiful as a desert ocean of sand. But you, I know, came against your will with these, and just out of curiosity. Nothing wrong with healthy curiosity." Then he handed me the bright leaves that he had held all that time crumpled in a grimy paw. "GET OUT!" he yelled, pointing at some stairs.

Just before I disappeared around a turn in the stairs I looked back, and I could tell by the little smile that chipped his soot-caked face this furnace tender of WHOOSH! was happy to have talked with me. **THE END**

COMING NEXT MONTH



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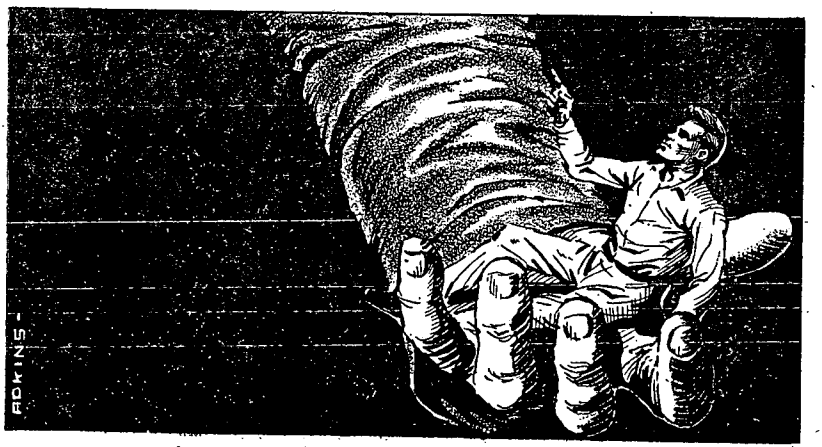
RETURN TO BROBDINGNAG



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By ADAM BRADFORD, M.D.

Illustrator ADKINS

Some issues back we were able to take you on a return voyage to Gulliver's Lilliput. Now, thanks to the researches and efforts of Dr. Bradford, we revisit Brobdingnag, with what results and ideas as you shall see.

MY readers will recall that on September 9, 1952, I set sail from Lilliput (FANTASTIC, December, 1963) with a store of water, meat and other provisions donated by the kindly Lilliputians. Since there was no gasoline in primitive Lilliput and my gasoline stores were low, I knew I would be foolish to attempt a return to England, particularly since there was still a possibility of late summer monsoons in the Indian Ocean. I had decided, therefore, to head south-southwest toward Madagascar hoping to find suitable shelter there.

Besides, I still had Gulliver's original maps in my possession and there remained within me the unsatiated desire to follow Gulliver in his travels to Brobdingnag, the Island of the Giants. Those of you who read the previous account of my voyage to Lilliput are familiar with the details of how I discovered Gulliver's original and detailed maps and logs of his adventures. Briefly, however, I had accidentally come upon a clue to Gulliver's life while doing some medical research in Oxford, England. By painstaking detective work, I was not only able to prove that Gulliver really existed (and that he had been plagiarized both by his cousin, Sympson, and by Jonathan Swift, who became famous because of this plagiarism) but was able to obtain the original, meticulous notes kept by Gulliver, himself. I then purchased the *Stella Nova*, a seaworthy yawl with an auxiliary motor, with which I had made the voyage to Lilliput.

The trip to Brobdingnag, I knew, would prove far more hazardous since the natives were approximately 60 feet tall and took "about ten yards at every Stride". On Brobdingnag, the grass grew 20 feet high and the corn stood "at least forty Foot". Gulliver, himself, had barely escaped with his life and, were it

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not for the kindness of Glumdalclitch, a young farmer's daughter who had befriended him, he would most certainly have perished in any one of several misadventures. For example, there were the times when he was almost dropped from a roof top by a giant pet monkey, crushed to death in a farmer's massive hands, or drowned in a bowl of milk that was being drunk by the Queen.

Although I knew that a return to Brobdingnag would be full of hazards and dangers, I also knew that I must go there. The further I sailed from Lilliput, the closer in my mind I came to Brobdingnag. Not a day passed without my wondering about the Brobdingnagians. How had these giants fared during the past two centuries? Why had not other explorers "discovered" them since the days of Gulliver's incredible adventures? I had to find out for myself.

I HAD anticipated that the trip from Lilliput to Madagascar (and civilization) would take about two weeks and I believed myself well prepared for this journey. The trade winds, however, were not always in my favor and there were several days that I was completely becalmed and in irons. On those occasions, I had to depend on my meager fuel supply, and it was not until the 23rd day that I finally sighted a towering distant range of mountains directly to the west. As best as I could figure my position, I was approximately at the 19th parallel, north of the Tropic of Capricorn. I had only about two gallons of gasoline in my fuel tank and my auxiliary tanks were empty. Fortunately, the wind was favorable and, on the morning of October 2, 1952, I found a small, sheltered, but busy harbor in which I could beach my vessel. I pulled up beside a small dock.

A few dark-skinned, half-naked boys and young men on the dock looked at me with what appeared to be a mixture of curiosity and suspicion as I waved to them and shouted greetings. At first, I was stunned by their appearance—they seemed so tall—but then I quickly realized that I had spent so much time with the tiny Lilliputians that everything would seem large for a while. Actually, compared to me, the natives were six or seven inches shorter. Since, however, the natives did not seem to be afraid or hostile, I cast anchor and shouted to them again.

"Where am I?" I asked. "What is the name of this country?" Since I got no reply, I repeated the question in the French that I learned in my college days. "Oui suis-je? Qu'est-ce que le nom de cette place? Est-il Madagascar?"

One of the younger men finally

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nodded his head. "Oui," he replied, "c'est Madagascar."

Thank Heavens, I thought. *Perhaps I can now get some rest and fuel.* I suddenly felt exhausted.

"Parlez-vous anglais?" I asked. "Est-il ici un homme qui parle anglais?" I knew that I would have to find someone who spoke English since my French was so limited.

"Oui," he replied. "Mon pere parle anglais un peu." He called to an older man who was fishing from a small dug-out canoe about 20 yards away. "Papa, Papa," he shouted, "J'ai ici un etranger qui voudrait parler anglais avec vous."

The old man pulled in his fishing line and rowed directly over to me. He proved to be a most amiable Malagasy of Hova stock; he had learned to speak English in 1942 while serving in the British Army after the temporary collapse of French Rule. His name, I learned, was Rabama and he proved to be a most valuable and helpful guide during my two months' stay in Madagascar. Without his help, I might have been stranded to this day in the small fishing port of Andevoranto where my boat lay then at anchor.

Thanks to Rabama's help, I was able to travel the 125 miles into the interior of Madagascar to Tananarive, the capitol, where I not only obtained adequate lodgings for myself but could arrange for the purchase of stores of gasoline and provisions for my return to Brobdingnag. I could also supervise the repair of some minor damage that had been done to the *Stella Nova.*

AT the end of two months, however, I felt that I had recuperated completely and that the time had come to leave Madagascar for my trip to Brobdingnag. Although Rabama and his son offered to accompany me on this voyage, I decided that it would be best to go alone. An additional "crew" meant additional provisions and it might also involve me in disciplinary problems or even in possible conflicts in a time of stress. So, shortly after dawn on the morning of December 15th, I set sail from Madagascar in my search for the Brobdingnagians.

According to Gulliver's maps, which I had studied carefully, Brobdingnag lay in the southern Indian Ocean just east of the major air and ocean routes between India and Africa. Gulliver had attempted to circumnavigate the Cape of Good Hope on his return home when his vessel was blown off course by a violent storm almost into the rock-bound coast of Brobdingnag. Gulliver had gone ashore with an exploring party in a small boat, but was left alone and abandoned on the beach

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when the rest of the party fled for their lives at the approach of a giant Brobdingnagian who had waded into the sea after them. It was this unfortunate accident that had provided Gulliver with one of the most exciting adventures of his life.

For me, the trip to Brobdingnag was to be no accident, for I had planned it carefully. Gulliver's detailed maps were spread out before me. My marine compass, Geiger counter and short-wave radio were in perfect working order. Furthermore, I decided to travel fully armed, packing in my trunk several small firearms and mounting on the stern of the *Stella Nova* a small machine gun that I had purchased in Tananarive. Although I hoped that my mission to Brobdingnag would be peaceful, I had to be prepared for any emergency. Being a doctor, I also lay in a store of antibiotics, antiseptics, quinine, DDT, sedatives and other drugs that might prove necessary.

If all went well, the trip from Madagascar to Brobdingnag should have been no more than a ten-day journey. But on the seventh day out, my Geiger counter indicated that I was heading into a zone of intense radiation (probably the result of the explosion in air of an experimental atomic bomb) that I had not anticipated and about which I had heard no warning. I, therefore, veered from my course in a northerly, or rather, northwesterly direction to escape the deadly radiation that seemed to be pursuing me. I knew that I would no longer be able to follow Gulliver's maps but would have to approach the peninsula of Brobdingnag from a more northerly direction, perhaps even from the direction of the range of volcanic mountains that constitute Brobdingnag's northern boundary. But, in leaving my original course (and being unable to return to it), I found it difficult to determine my exact position. I knew that I was in the Indian Ocean approximately at 12° latitude and 60° longitude but, of course, the atomic radiation might have altered the readings on my magnetic compass.

At any rate, I had now been 18 days at sea without sight of land and the tropical sun began to play havoc with my nerves and disposition. It was on the 18th night that I had a nightmare that undoubtedly saved my life. I had allowed the *Stella Nova* to drift as I slept and I surely would have been dashed against a rocky and treacherous shore had I not been suddenly aroused from my sleep by the violent dream. Luckily, I had the good judgment to start my engines before being almost driven into a mountainous boulder directly ahead of me and veered within a few inches out of

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its path. Almost reflexly, I headed the *Stella Nova* out to sea, deciding to wait till morning before exploring the land before me.

WHEN the sun rose, I knew that I had, somehow, reached my destination. The lofty, barren peaks and the size of the giant birds that hovered overhead seemed identical to those in Brobdingnag described so vividly by Gulliver. I only had to find some harbor or inlet where I could anchor my boat. My heart beat wildly. This could easily be the most exciting—and most dangerous—adventure of my whole life.

I tried to follow the coast line as closely as I could and headed in a southerly direction. I must have traveled about two miles when I came to a sandy beach at the mouth of a river. As I sailed upstream, I found the terrain growing more rocky and forbidding, but the temperature now was more pleasant and I was sheltered from the harsh sun by the tall cliffs that steadily increased in size as I moved into the interior. I had traveled this way for several hours, witnessing no signs of life except for the giant insects and birds that flew above me. The cliffs on either side prevented my seeing any other evidence of civilization.

I had just started to prepare some lunch when I heard a strange sound and the flapping of wings overhead. A giant hawk had spied me on the *Stella Nova* and was circling menacingly about 30 feet above. She must have mistaken me for a *Splacknuck,* a worm-like creature about six feet long that is indigenous to Brobdingnag, and which the hawks regard as choice morsels. Quickly, as the hawk dove in for the kill, I reached for my Luger and finished it off before it could cause any damage.

As the hawk dropped lifelessly to the water beside me, I heard a thunderous roar of laughter and the next thing I knew I was suddenly whisked out of my boat by a giant hand that held me firmly in its grip.

"Molash, Molash," I cried as loudly as I could and held my hands in a supplicating posture. I now knew that I was in the clutch of a Brobdingnagian who was holding me to his face to inspect me closely. "Molash" was the Brobdingnagian word for "Peace" or "I surrender". Apparently, he had observed the circling hawk and had witnessed its death. I was obviously no ordinary *Splacknuck.* Never before had a Splacknuck shot down a hawk! Furthermore, since (I later discovered) the Brobdingnagians had no firearms, the hawk's sudden death was most surprising to the Brobdingnagian who had observed this incident.

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The few words of Brobdingnagian that I had learned from Gulliver's account now stood me in good stead. I asked to be taken to *Lorbrulgrud* which had been the capitol city in Gulliver's time. I was told that I was already in Lorbrulgrud and thus could be spared the arduous journey to this metropolis. Luckily, too, the Brobdingnagian who had so unceremoniously swooped me out of my boat was a *Slardel* or a "Gentlemen Usher of the Court", a title that had been retained for the two-and-a-half centuries since they were described by Gulliver, but whose position had deteriorated to that of a minor domestic.

AT any rate, seeing that I meant no harm and being amused by my diminutive size, the *Slardel* placed me carefully in his pocket to take me home to his family. One last glance at the river below me made my heart sick because the *Stella Nova* appeared to be drifting aimlessly to sea, being carried along by the river's current. I tried to shout and attract the *Slardel's* attention and pointed to the river below us. He, however, misinterpreted my wiggling, thinking only that I was trying to break free, and he stuffed me even more resolutely into the deeper recesses of his pocket. My hope of ever returning to England or the United States was shattered. There was only one possible, but remote, chance that I might, at a later date, convince the Brobdingnagians to build me another boat since, from Gulliver's account, they were excellent craftsmen.

Being bounced around in the *Slardel's* pocket as he strode home was a terrifying experience. His pocket was about 2 feet deep and, although I was on my knees, my arms and head hung over the open top. I was about thirty feet above ground and can verify that, without exaggeration, each bump stride was "about ten yards" long, as Gulliver had described.

The next few hours are confused in my mind. The rocking during the trip across the country, the heat of the sun, and not having had anything to eat for almost a day proved too much for me and I must have fainted. At any rate, when I awoke, I found myself on what appeared to be a massive bed in a bedroom that was approximately 200 feet wide and 100 feet high. An old giant of a woman with ugly wrinkles, deep as furrows, was watching me. At my first sign of awakening, she whispered hoarsely in a voice that was deafening to my unaccustomed ears, "Brachtig, Brachtig." In a moment, the room was filled with a dozen or more Brobdingnagians, all towering above the bed and watching

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me with curiosity, all making gestures in my direction and laughing at my antics as I tried to rouse from my weakness and drowsiness.

Like Gulliver, I felt mortified at the insignificance of my own size compared to that of the Brobdingnagians. The ear-shattering conversations between them were actually painful and, when I clapped my hands over my ears to keep out some of the noise, they laughed all the harder. However, during their conversations, I managed to hear the words, *Replum Scalcath,* which was the same designation they had affixed to Gulliver and which, I knew, meant "freak of nature". From that time on and during my entire stay in Brobdingnag, I was always known by the name of *Replum Scalcath.* Nevertheless, since I was both an object of considerable interest and amusement, I was not harmed; actually, I was well taken care of.

The person who provided me with my care was the old lady sitting at the bedside. She, I discovered later, was a great-great-great granddaughter of Glumdalclitch, the little child who had taken care of Gulliver. I must admit, too, that I grew accustomed to her ugly appearance and came to regard her as a close friend. She proved to be a person of great nobility in that country since Glumdalclitch, after being made a member of the royal household, had married a prince. As a matter of fact, Glumdalclitch's account of her experience with Gulliver had been recorded in a book (The Replum Scalcath Brinktok) but, by now, all of the educated Brobdingnagians had grown to consider the whole episode as a fairy tale since nobody in Brobdingnag had ever seen another Replum Scalcath since Gulliver's day.

ACCORDINGLY, I was fitted out with a small house of my own, much like the one that had been built for Gulliver. My food was served to me in dishes used by the children in their make-believe games with dolls. The old noblewoman, whose name was *Veralka,* made certain that I was comfortable, clean and well fed. Nevertheless, every action of mine was closely observed and recorded, and I could not help feeling that I was not only a prisoner among the Brobdingnagians but, even worse, something of an experimental animal.

I might have remained forever a prisoner locked in my house without ever being able to journey through this miraculous country had not an incident occurred that brought me directly to the King's attention. One hot afternoon, a giant wasp (which even to this day are as big as par-

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tridges, exactly as Gulliver had described them) entered Veralka's bedroom as she was taking a short nap. The wasp was buzzing over Veralka's face when she was awakened by the threatening sound and she screamed in fright. Since my own house was kept on a table in Veralka's bedroom, I was attracted to the buzzing noise myself. Luckily, the Brobdingnagians had not removed my Luger from my person, since they had no firearms, themselves, and did not understand their use. Taking careful aim, I shot down the wasp almost as it was about to descend on Veralka's face.

From that day on, I was something of a hero in the eyes of the Brobdingnagians. At my request (since Veralka was so grateful), I obtained an audience with the King the following morning and, thereafter, became a somewhat pampered pet in the King's household. It was in this fashion that I was able to travel the length and breadth of Brobdingnag with royal bodyguards at my side to keep me from all danger and harm. Because of this royal favor, I could observe the customs and habits of the inhabitants that I shall now describe in some detail.

The physical aspects of the country remain to this day much as they had been in 1703 when they were first visited by Gulli-

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ver. Brobdingnag is approximately 6000 miles long and 3000 miles wide. The steep, craggy shores on all exposed sides and the impenetrable volcanic mountains in the north have made Brobdingnag both immune to invaders and also immune to any of the technological advances that we consider so essential to our own civilization.

For example, the Brobdingnagians are still woefully behind us in methods of mass destruction, lacking not only atomic bombs but also elementary knowledge of simple explosives, such as gunpowder. Although they marveled at the ability of my Luger (which they considered a toy) to shoot down hawks and wasps, they simply rationalized my need for such a weapon as further evidence of my small, defenseless size. No big man, certainly no Brobdingnagian, could ever need such artificial aids in battle or in self defense. Only a *little* man, only a Replum Scalcath, they derided me repeatedly, would resort to any mechanical device of physical violence. A *real* man (*again*, not a Replum Scalcath) needs only wit and brawn to survive, they claim. I mention this only to point out how backward these people still are. It is probably because of their security and their isolation that they haven't learned anything new.

THE chief city of Brobdingnag is still *Lorbrulgrud* and it stands on each side of a river as it has from almost time immemorial. What amazed me most was that the city contains only 80,000 houses, exactly as it did in Gulliver's day. In over 200 years, the population has not increased. When I queried my royal guards about this odd circumstance, I was greeted by a stony silence. Consequently, my curiosity was further heightened and I made a note to question the King at my next royal audience.

The King, whose name is Rhamasad Grig or Rhamasad the Third, (incidentally, I can't help wonder whether there isn't some relationship here to the ancient Rhamses Dynasty in Egypt) couldn't understand the nature of my question which he, at first, dismissed as being manifestly stupid. I repeated my question as best I could, believing that the King had failed to understand either because he could not hear the softness of my voice (which, to a Brobdingnagian, is a mere whisper) or because I had not yet mastered their native language.

"How is it," I fairly shouted, "that the population of your country has not changed in over two hundred years? Do your subjects use birth control?"

He seemed perplexed at the latter question and demanded a full explanation of birth control.

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Fortunately, as a physician, I was able to provide him with a thorough and detailed account of the subject. The King could not believe that such a practice would be necessary with *humanoids* as small as I, who ate so little and who took up such little space. But, when I described for him the immensity of our populations, the crowding of our cities, and the poverty of many of our citizens, he reversed his position and expressed great curiosity as to why this practice was not more universally accepted in our countries.

When I tried to explain that many of our citizens were still too ignorant to understand the various methods or had religious taboos concerning the problem, he made some derisive comments about *Replum Scalcaths* and indicated that now he understood why we were such an inferior race. Actually, I had tried to defend our laws and our customs to the best of my ability because I certainly did not want to cast any aspersions on our great and noble people. But the more I made my explanations, the more the King seemed to be impressed with the backwardness of our society. From this discussion, I could only conclude that the King was as rigid and medieval in his thinking as the other Brobdingnagians.

Actually, I also learned from this interview with his Royal Highness that the Brobdingnagians did not understand birth control and never practiced it. Instead, they had a method which might best be described as *death* control. In Lorbrulgrud, for example, the population has been kept at a constant figure by simply killing off the oldest citizen whenever a child was born. In a solemn yet joyous ceremony, the oldest person in town simply drinks a potion called *Zoob*, and then quietly passes into his eternal sleep. Although I never learned the exact chemical formula of *Zoob*, I did discover that it was a toxic distillate of some naturally fermentable herbs and grains. I mention this not because I believe *death* control is preferable to *birth* control but simply because I want to report accurately the customs of this strange country. The natives, I suspected, were reluctant to discuss this practice with me, whom they considered so much below them in logic or understanding. Nevertheless, the custom did resemble, superficially at least, the traditional behavior of some old New England towns whose population had not changed for two or three centuries because no new settlers are allowed to move in until some old settler moves out.

THOSE readers who are still curious about *death* control

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and related problems in Brobdingnag will find more information on this subject in a book that I am writing, describing in detail my several adventures. But perhaps I can add another word or two even in this brief account. Because of death control, the population of Brobdingnag is relatively young, the average age being 42 years and 8 months. Furthermore, Brobdingnagian women, like other large mammals, have a longer gestation period, approximately 19 months. Furthermore, puberty is not reached until the age of 22 in the male and 18 in the female. These physiological facts contribute toward the development of a relatively stable population and birth and death are thus matched up fairly evenly. It is understandable that, if pregnancy were achieved at the earlier age of 15 or 16, as it often is in our country, the average age of the citizenry would soon be reduced to the teens.

Manifestly, such an approach as death control would have to be modified in many ways if we attempted to apply it to our own civilization. For the Brobdingnagians, however, it is eminently suited to their way of life. In Brobdingnag, for example, there are no problems pertaining to the care of the aged; there are so few old people. I must admit that I never discussed our aged population with His Royal Highness because I was fearful what his answer might be and I was anxious, in every way, to avoid his displeasure.

Although I had now been in Brobdingnag six months, I had not yet seen the Temple in Lorbrulgrud, whose towers Gulliver had described as being 3000 feet high. This puzzled me because a church edifice of this height should have been easily visible from my portable home as I traveled through the country, escorted by the princes who were responsible for my care and protection.

One day as Veralka was bathing me and seemed particularly affectionate, I got up enough courage to ask her what had become of the spires. As far as I could determine from her reply, I learned that the towers had been knocked down by lightning in the Year of the Big Storm (about 1863) and that they were not rebuilt. As a matter of fact, long before this devastation, which cost the Lorbrulgrudians 2086 lives, the Brobdingnagians had begun to develop a more sophisticated concept of religion. According to their current teachings, which were first advanced more than three centuries ago, God is "as tall as he is broad as he is long" and so all of their religious edifices now are built exactly in the shape of a cube, about the

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size of a modern airplane hangar or even larger. Man's aspirations, they believe, should not reach to the skies but should reach all over the earth for the betterment of man, himself. The function of religion is to make man a good man, not a God.

In some other ways, however, the religion of the Brobdingnagians is curiously unsophisticated. The word "God" in Brobdingnagian is "KRA", and it is synonymous with their term for "Sun". Unlike other primitive peoples who regard the Sun-God as a personified or animated being, the Brobdingnagians worship KRA or the Sun only as an inanimate object from which (they believe) all life on earth emanates. Their scientific measurements concerning the sun, both in its flaming potentiality and its distance from the earth, are curiously like our own. Worship of KRA is based not on myth but on the rational, scientific understanding that it is the sun that supports all life on earth. KRA is *not* a gigantic, personified deity. It may be because the Brobdingnagians are so large, themselves, that they feel no need to worship strength or force, per se.

RELIGIOUS services are held monthly at the time of the full moon. Carried along by my nurse, Veralka, I had an opportunity to visit several church services, including some celebrations of major holidays, such as the gathering-in of the fall harvest. In some respects, these services reminded me of those conducted by the Bahai church but there were significant differences. As far as I could determine, there is no ordained ministry. Instead, one man (or woman) is chosen by the congregation to *"praktak longvig"* (deliver the sermon). This "sermon" is a giant roll of paper containing multiple perforations. The piece of paper is placed in a machine something like our old-fashioned automatic player piano but, instead of music emanating from the machine, Brobdingnagian speech thunders from the amplifying units. (I might add parenthetically that the machine in which the *"praktak longvig"* is played is the only recording device which the Brobdingnagians possess, for I saw no evidence of equipment such as our ordinary phonograph discs or tape recorders.)

In other words, the "sermon" is not delivered by any person but through a recording device. In this way, the congregation is exposed only to the best religious advice and counsel and is not compelled to listen to idle meanderings, insipid musings, fevered rantings, or the petty hair-splittings that still pour forth from

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our own pulpits today. After the sermon, the members of the congregation engage in a lively discussion concerning the theological and spiritual concepts discussed. If any member of the congregation finds that he can rephrase a portion of a sermon to make it more beautiful, inspiring or more meaningful, the sermon is edited and made consistent with the best theological thinking of the time.

The "sermons", I discovered later, numbered 46 in all and represent the most profound concepts of the theologians of the country. The most recent "sermon" was prepared in its first draft a little over ten years ago. Another sermon goes back to 1864, the year after the Year of the Big Storm and it is an inspiring lecture on how one should cope with the personal disasters that can occur in a lifetime. This sermon, for example, points out that some adversity is inherent in the lot of every man. It contends further that each man is to be measured not by his degree of success but the way in which he meets adversity. Most of the sermons are at least several years old and some go back to Brobdingnagian antiquity, but even these ancient sermons have been modified and edited through the years to conform to the best current theological concepts of their country. In this way, although most of the sermons have their roots in the past, they are immediately and directly applicable to everyday Brobdingnagian life.

I DISCOVERED later, when I had an opportunity to talk with the King, that he was as much interested in theology as his subjects. I discovered, too, that it was at his suggestion that Veralka brought me regularly to witness their worship once I expressed the desire to attend. Because of the King's keen interest in religion, he spent one whole morning with me in questioning and disputation. He queried me regarding the beliefs and practices of my people (the Replum Scalcaths). I tried to explain to him as best I could that, although most of us who live in civilized countries believe in one God or a universal deity, we did not worship the sun but rather conceived of the Lord as a giant human being even bigger than a Brobdingnagian. I pointed out, too, that many of us had strongly-held views about heaven and hell, about angels, saints and Messiahs.

At this the King let forth a deafening roar of laughter because, as he explained to me, he could not understand why religion had to become so involved. The Brobdingnagians believe that each man is master of his own destiny and the reward or

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lack of reward which one achieves in life usually reflects fairly closely a person's just deserts. To believe that eternal reward or punishment would come either in heaven or hell was deserving only of a Replum Scalcath.

Since I could see that I had no way of liberating the King from his primitive thinking, I thought it best to abandon any further discussion on the Deity, Himself, but to talk with him instead about our great and noble martyrs and about the inspirational leadership in religious thinking that our people derive from our educated and learned priesthood. Here again, I found myself facing an obdurate and uncomprehending person. The King could not understand why a specialized priesthood or ministry was at all necessary when each man, himself, could be educated in the knowledge of what was morally right and wrong and what is ethically good and evil. Rather than incur the King's wrath or be further stigmatized as a mere Replum Scalcath, I decided that it would be best never again to attend their religious services or discuss religion with any Brobdingnagian.

The government of Brobdingnag is still a constitutitonal monarchy, much as it was in Gulliver's time, but with greater emphasis on the word, "constitutional". Assisting the King in his decisions and in policy-making are a House of Commons and a House of Lords. Whereas members of the House of Lords achieve their position through inheritance, the House of Commons is elected by the population at large. The voting age is 14 years, both for boys and girls and, although this may seem young in our eyes, the Brobdingnagians believe that by giving young persons an active voice in government, it eliminates many of the problems which we consider under the general heading of "juvenile delinquency". Youngsters are educated in an understanding of their government almost as soon as they are able to read and write.

IN voting, each citizen in Brobdingnag is not allowed merely one vote as is currently the practice in our democracies, but, instead, may cast anywhere from 1 to 10 votes for the candidate of his choice, depending on his education and intellectual achievements. Professors of universities and other leading citizens (shrewd businessmen, research scholars, talented musicians) may cast as many as 10 votes for their candidate. Uneducated persons such as day laborers, servants and those otherwise disinterested in government or education can cast only 1 vote apiece. Dentists and accountants can

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usually cast 2 votes but, with special courses of study, can raise the number of votes to 4 or even 5. General surgeons, whose political knowledge Brobdingnagians consider meager, cast only 3 or 4 votes and rarely as many as 5. Lawyers, members of the Royal Family and others of noble blood are often allowed to cast 8 or 9 votes each. These classifications are not rigid or fixed, for a citizen can change his voting status by course of study and by taking periodic qualifying examinations. Although it seemed to me that this method of balloting runs counter to true democratic principles in which the ignorant and the neer-do-well can elect their candidates as easily as those supported by an educated and intellectual elite, it apparently has worked with considerable success in the eyes of the Brobdingnagians.

Only on one occasion in a discussion with the King did I have an opportunity to criticize this method of voting. I tried to point out that a truly democratic government must give equal voice to all of its citizens and I explained to him how political campaigns are conducted and won in our country. The King, however, silenced my comments abruptly by replying rather sternly that it was more logical that those who took a more active hand in the management of the country should have more to say about that management than those whose interest was not evident or barely appreciable. Being no student of politics, I could find no argument in reply and thought it best to let the subject drop. I merely mention the Brobdingnagian method of "proportional" voting not because I favor or endorse it but simply to point out how strange the political practices of this remote country are.

AS I pointed out in the previous account of my voyage to Lilliput, I am an orthopedic surgeon by profession and neither a legislator nor a student of business or government. I hope, therefore, that I may be forgiven if I may have erred in may appraisal of the political or the religious life of the Brobdingnagians. Being a physician, however, I was most anxious to learn how the Brobdingnagians cared for their sick. Here again, I must acknowledge the help that was given to me by my aged "nurse", Veralka. It was through her efforts that I was able to gain access into several of the hospitals of Lorbrulgrud and in the neighboring communities.

Because of the policy of "death" control, the Brobdingnagians concern themselves but little about the problems of the senile and the aged. Nursing home scandals, which are periodically present in our country, are

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practically unknown there. Similarly, since the Brobdingnagians neither smoke nor drink nor drive automobiles, most of the manmade threats to life and health which we encounter in our civilization are not present here. The sick are treated in a conservative fashion. Although some antibiotic substances are known to them, they differ from those that we possess. Fortunately, I was able to obtain samples of 22 of their most valued remedies for chemical and bacteriological analysis at a later date because I hoped, even then, that some day I might be able to return to the States.

It is in the field of *surgery* that the Brobdingnagians have achieved such a remarkable degree of success as to make me envious of their ability and their organizations. In *Kralgat*, their leading hospital, I was able to spend several days in their surgical amphitheatre, my house being suspended by a wire from the ceiling so that I could look down upon their operating tables. I discovered that their surgical teams, more often than not, were composed of young women comparable to the nurses in our own hospitals. Each surgical "team" consisted of 4 to 6 women who specialized in doing a *single* operative procedure and thus each team acquired great skill in performing the task to which it was assigned. The surgeon used his skill in making a diagnosis and assigning the patient to the appropriate surgical team.

For example, if a patient were admitted to the hospital complaining of abdominal pain that necessitated surgery, the surgeon would decide whether the patient had acute appendicitis, a twisted ovarian cyst, a perforated peptic ulcer, a cancerous obstruction to the bowel, or some other surgical condition. The patient was then assigned to the team that did this one procedure and nothing else. In other words, there was one team of "nurses" that performed only appendectomies. Another team operated only in cases of intestinal obstruction. A third team devoted itself exclusively to the repair of ulcers and its complications. Others were skilled in amputations or eye grafts or heart surgery.

In my own mind, I could not help but contrast their efficiency to the standards of practice in our own country, in which the general surgeon is required to be a "Jack of all trades" but may never acquire the high degree of proficiency in any one surgical procedure which the Brobdingnagians, by their better organization, possess.

I MUST admit that although my days in Brobdingnag passed happily enough and I did not en-

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counter any of the great trials to which Gulliver had been subjected, I resented the frequent and ill-concealed innuendoes about my being a Replum Scalcath and I was anxious to return home. I was tired, too, of constantly being on display, tired of being a caged animal, yet fearful of being let loose lest I be trampled accidentally under the foot of a Brobdingnagian.

In other words, I had grown homesick and yearned for the time that I could return to my own country, to see again my family and friends and to write an account of my several adventures. I vowed that, should I be fortunate enough to get back, my sea-faring days would be over and I would settle down in Boston to practice orthopedic surgery with my uncle. By now, too, I had been in Brobdingnag two years and four months and, as the days wore on, my heart filled more and more with despair because the prospect of ever getting back became more bleak.

I might have forever perished in Brobdingnag had it not been for a remarkable coincidence. My nurse, Veralka, was asked to care for one of the Prince's children while he and his wife went to supervise the opening of his summer estate. Having no one to leave me with, she took me with her, holding me and my house in her arms just like a housewife carries her bag of shopping out of a supermarket. The trip was a short distance of about two hundred miles but, as a precautionary measure, I strapped myself to the bed (which was nailed to the floor) by means of long leather thongs to avoid the jostling and bumping that the trip would necessitate. In this way, I arrived at the Prince's palace without mishap.

I should mention here that the Prince had two daughters; the older one, aged 8, accompanied her father to their estate in the mountains while the other, about two, stayed home because she was too young to travel. The Prince had already left before we arrived and Veralka, seeing the younger one dirtied from playing in a sand box, decided to give her a bath. The "bath tub", it turned out, was a small artificial lake in the back of the palace and it was "fed" by the principal river of Lorbrulgrud. The waters in the lake were held back by a dam which could easily be opened to drain the water out or closed after fresh water had been allowed in.

To my almost unbelievable surprise, there in the middle of this child's "bath tub" stood, like a plaything, my own boat the *Stella Nova*. My heart beat with wild excitement as I saw it because now, for the first time, the possibility of returning home pre-

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sented itself. The Stella Nova had its sails furled and the child, while being bathed, blew on them in much the same way as our children play with toy boats. Apparently my boat had not drifted completely out to sea and had not been damaged. It must have been discovered wedged in the rocks of the riverbed by some Brobdingnagian and had been given to the King as a gift. I can only surmise that this was so but, of course, I shall never know the whole truth.

ALMOST at once a plan for escape began to form in my mind. I called for Veralka and feigned hunger but hid the provisions under my bed. At supper that night, I again asked for still more food but ate only sparingly, hiding as much as I could wherever possible. That night when Veralka was asleep, I took the long leather thongs and tied them to the opposite bars of my cage. Then I unscrewed a leg from my table, placed it between the leather thongs and tightened the thongs like a tourniquet. Fortunately, the leather thongs were strong and, by tightening them, I was able to force in the bars just enough to allow me to squeeze out and to carry out my provisions which I had tied into my bed sheets, along with my few personal belongings.

I quickly unwound my leather thongs, tied them together and, with them, lowered my provisions to the floor. Then, to make my escape complete, I slid down the leather thongs which, fortunately, were long enough to reach to the floor. Scurrying close to the walls, almost like a frightened mouse, I managed to get to the lake in the back of the palace. Fortunately, the dam had been opened to let the old bath water out but had not been refilled. About four feet of water remained in the tub and I was able to push the *Stella Nova* into the river. I did not dare to test my auxiliary motors nor to check on the condition of the boat's interior. I was just glad to be free.

Luckily, the current of the river was swift because it was May and the spring run-off from the mountains had not yet ceased. A half-moon and a cloudless night gave me just enough light so that I could navigate the *Stella Nova* down the middle of the river and avoid the treacherous rocks at the sides. When dawn broke in the East, Brobdingnag was only a faint shoreline in the distance behind me.

I checked my gasoline. I still had about twenty gallons in one of the storage tanks. I used the rubber tubing of my stethoscope (which was still intact in my emergency medicine cabinet) to siphon the gas into my main tank. I started up my engine and

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—miraculously—it worked. Now I could only trust to luck and my skill as a nagivator. At last, at last, I had escaped from Brobdingnag. And I was tired and faint with hunger and anxiety. My plan was to try to reach Madagascar again.

Some of you who are readers of the Manchester *Guardian* may recall a small item that appeared on June 3, 1955, but most of you, I am sure, have forgotten it. I was able to obtain a clipping only later and it reads as follows:

Survivor Spotted at Sea

Port Elizabeth, S. Africa: The Captain of the luxury liner, *Queen Frederika*, saved the life of an unknown sailor when he detected a small craft drifting aimlessly in the Indian Ocean about eighty miles southwest of Port Elizabeth. Veering from his usual course to the stricken vessel, the Captain believed, at first, that the craft was unmanned but sent two of his officers to board the vessel and search it. A man, peculiarly dressed and worn from exposure and apparently raving about giants, was found on the small vessel and taken aboard the Queen Frederika. He was then flown by helicopter to Port Elizabeth and hospitalized. His condition is considered critical. Identification of the unknown sailor is still incomplete.

I NEED not add that I was that "unknown sailor". It was on June 8th that I first regained consciousness and discovered that I was at the St. Barnabas Hospital in Port Elizabeth. Once full consciousness returned, I began to realize how futile it was to try to convince the skeptical doctors that I had spent almost two-and-one-half years in a land of giants, in a country that Gulliver visited more than two hundred years ago. Instead, I made up some simple yarn about how I had been out fishing and my mast had been blown down in a storm. I hate to fabricate but, knowing doctors, I was sure that I would be committed as insane if I told them the truth. My simple lie was ultimately believed and I was discharged.

Fortunately, the Stella Nova had been towed to port by a fishing vessel that was nearby and had intercepted the radio message from the *Queen Frederika* to Port Elizabeth and my boat was safely anchored in one of the docks at harbor. My precious vials of Brobdingnagian antibiotics and medicines and Gulliver's original notes had not been touched, but some of my other equipment, especially my Geiger Counter and my ship-to-shore

(Continued on page 123)

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Death Before Dishonor

By DOBBIN THORPE

Rena Arblest was, perhaps, no better than she should be.

But she was no worse, either.

And therefore deserved less than she received.

RENA Arblest woke with a splitting headache and a dull pain in her left thigh. The headache she was used to. Her Sunday morning hangover. But the pain in her thigh was something new.

She untangled herself from the knot of sheets, blankets, and bedspreads, pulled up her rayon nightgown, and found that her left thigh had been bandaged over. Drops of dried blood speckled the gauze. Wincing, she pulled off the bandage.

"Ohmygod!" she groaned. Because, there, on her thigh was a big red rose with green leaves and three inches of thorny stem. It wasn't too clear yet—clotted blood blurred the edges of the tattoo—but it was clear enough to make out the words printed on the scroll that circled her American Beauty: SAM—FOREVER!

She didn't know anyone called Sam. Hank, Larry, Barnie, Lou, Roy, or Gordon would have made some sense. But Sam? While she drank her first cup of coffee, she went through her phone book. There was her uncle, Samuel Arblt, but he had been dead six years. There's a Sam's Bar on Division Street, but that couldn't be it. After her second cup of coffee she went into the bathroom and tried to wash the design off her thigh. The dull pain became lively; one of the thorns dripped fresh blood; but the rose faded not at all. It was a for-real tattoo.

The phone rang. It was Sam.

"Sam *who?*" Rena screamed into the receiver.

"Why, Sam Zimmerman! Don't tell me you've forgotten already? Boy, you were really stoned last night." Sam Zimmerman laughed.

"Did *you* put this thing on my leg last night?"

"Who do you think?"

Rena let loose. When she had a hangover, she was even more inventive than when she was high. For a woman, she had a really

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astonishing command of the colloquial. Pausing for breath, she realized that there was only a faint buzz listening to her. Sam had hung up.

She went to the yellow pages and looked under Tattooists. Sam Zimmerman's Expert Tattoo Parlor was on State Street. She called the number listed for the parlor No one answered. It wouldn't be open on Sunday morning. She looked in the large directory. There were over twenty Sam Zimmermans. She seethed.

The phone rang. It was Hank Burney.

"I can't see you today, Hank. I'm sorry, it isn't possible."

"I'm only in town until seven tonight. I've got to start back to Philly at seven." Hank was a truck driver and, in consequence, a big spender. She felt just sick refusing him.

"I'm sorry, baby. I'm really sorry."

"You've got somebody else there. Is that the deal?"

"No, baby—I'm sick. I'm really awful sick."

"Hell, it's Sunday morning. Everyone is sick."

"You don't under*stand*."

"I think I do."

There was a knock on the door.

"Hank, I've got to hang up. There's someone at the door." She could almost hear Hank grinning with contempt.

"I'm coming over." He hung up.

RENA threw on a terrycloth bathrobe over her nightgown, straightened out the bedspread, and opened the door a crack.

"Hi, Rena."

She didn't recognize him, although she had the feeling that she would like to. Six foot, thick red hair, and a thick red face of the kind that Rena considered handsome. His bared arms were black with tattooes.

"Are you Sam?" He nodded; she considered. "Well, you better come in." She took the chainlock off the door and admitted him.

Sam glanced at her leg inquisitively. "How's it feeling? The soreness wears off in three, four days."

"You've got to take it off. You've got to. I can't have people seeing that . . . that *thing* on my leg. It's indecent."

"But last night you were begging me to put it on. Besides, no one is going to see it there except me. How about a peek?"

"No!" Rena pulled her bathrobe tight about her legs. "I don't even know you."

Sam replied with a grin.

"Ohmygod," Rena mumbled. Then, more emphatically, "Oh my God."

"What're you doing this morning, anything?"

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Rena remembered that Hank was on his way over. If he found her here with Sam, there'd be the devil to pay. How did she ever get in these situations? Drink, she told herself for perhaps the hundredth time. She drank too much.

"What I thought," Sam went on, "is that we can go back to the parlor, if you really want me to take it off. It looked so pretty last night. But if that's what you want. . . ."

"Please. I'll be ready in one minute." She took her clothes into the bathroom and, for once, she was as good as her word. She was ready in fifty-eight seconds.

* * *

Sam Zimmerman was a serious believer in the art of tattooing. He knew he was the best tattoo artist in Chicago, which is no mean boast. But that was not enough. Sam Zimmerman wanted to surpass himself. The only competitor of a daVinci is daVinci himself.

Sam escorted Rena through his parlor and explained some of his more esoteric designs. But all the while, he was sizing her up. She was small. In a way, that was an advantage. The size of the canvas is not the criterion of a masterpiece—and she would probably stay small. Sam had seen too many excellent tattooes spoiled by sagging flesh—shapely nudes turned into baggy haridans, proud eagles drooping their spread wings. But Rena would probably keep her shape for a long time. Sam judged her to be close to thirty, and if she was going to put on weight, she would show signs of it by now.

Sam, himself, was thirty-six. He had never been married. He was going to marry Rena. He had decided that last night at the Loop Bar, where he had picked her up. And he could be pretty sure of himself on that score. A tattooed lady doesn't have much choice in the way of husbands.

Meanwhile, he humored her.

"This one," he said, pointing to a knight on a black charger that was reared up over a dragon, "was my first really good design. It takes about twelve hours and costs four hundred bucks."

Rena whistled.

"I didn't want to put just any old design on my own chest, you know. I spent years deciding what it should be. Well, this was it. Let me show you." Rena raised a hand in protest, only to be handed Sam's sweat-stained tee-shirt. The same knight on the same rearing horse poised over the same fire-breathing dragon was on Sam's chest. The knight's lance extended up to his right shoulder, and the dragon's tail vanished beneath his belt.

"There's a story that goes with this picture. You see the

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shield he's holding up—it's right in front of my heart. Well, when I was called up for the draft and sent over to Korea, that shield stopped a bullet." Rena laughed. "Laugh, if you want to, but it's the God's truth."

"When are you going to take this thing off my leg," Rena demanded. "I ain't got all day."

"Sit down on the table over there and let me take a look at it." Rena hesitated. "If you're going to be modest, I can't do a thing for you, sweetheart."

"That's better. Now, this is going to hurt some, so grit your teeth. He dipped the needle into a bottle of disinfectant, wiped the tip with cotton wool, and turned on the electric motor. It sounded like a dentist's drill. Rena was terrified of dentists.

"Don't jump like that!"

"It *hurts*."

"I told you it would hurt."

Rena began to sob. "You've got to do something."

"Well. . . ." Sam Zimmerman smiled slyly. ". . . most people find that a snort or two stops most of the stinging. How do you like it, straight or on the rocks?"

"Don't you remember?"

Sam poured out one tumbler of Scotch.

"Aren't you having any?"

"I've got to be sober."

While Rena sipped at her first Scotch, Sam showed her the tattooes on his back.

"Personally, I could do much better than that, but the back is the one place a man can't get to himself. Now, here's something interesting . . ." Sam rolled up his pantsleg. A large, red heart stood out on his calf. Printed on the heart was the single word: MOTHER. "You wouldn't believe it, but that little design saved my mother's life."

Rena was getting to the point where she would believe it, however. She had had no breakfast, and the Scotch was taking hold.

While Rena drank her second tumblerful, Sam showed her his special portfolio.

"Oooh, that one is pretty," Rena purred.

"You like that?"

IT was eight o'clock. Hank Burney was too mad to care. At seven o'clock he had begun drinking from the bottle. Now the bottle was empty. He rummaged through Rena's kitchen for another without success. He did find a salami in the icebox and he brought it back into Rena's combination living room-dining room-bedroom. There he sat, surlily, slicing off chunks of meat with a bread knife, and chewing. At eight-thirty, he lit his last cigar. Deliberately, he used the floor for an ash tray.

At nine o'clock or a little after (Hank had, by that time, smashed Rena's alarm clock-ra-

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dio on the floor), Rena arrived home.

"Where the hell have you been all day?"

"I went to the art. . . ." Rena was rather unsteady on her feet, but her dignity was, if anything, heightened—easily the equal of Hank's. ". . . to the art muszeme."

"You're high as a kite."

"Yourshelf," Rena retorted spiritedly. "And what, may I ask, are *you* doing in *my* apartment?"

"I used my key."

"I never! I call that nerve, I. . . ." Rena fell back into an overstuffed sofa from the excess of her outrage. There she fell asleep.

She woke up in a very few moments, as Hank was loosening her tight clothing.

"What's these two bandages for?"

"I scratched myself. Leave me alone!"

"Come off it. You know I missed the boat on your account tonight. I'll get called on the carpet for sure, and it's all your fault."

As Rena prepared to retire, she had a vague recollection of something she was not supposed to do. A red-headed voice which she could not quite identify whispered in her ear: "You promise?"

"I promise," she replied.

"Promise what?" Hank wanted to know.

"Then say so," the voice commanded.

"There'll never be anyone else but you."

Hank guffawed.

"Swear it," the voice said.

"I swear it."

"You're honor-bound to live up to that. If you don't—" The voice became very grim. "—there's nothing I can do to help you."

"Well, I'll believe you," Hank said, grinning. "Just for tonight, I'll believe it."

* * *

At four o'clock in the morning, Hank got out of bed to go into the bathroom. He was gone no more than five minutes. When he had returned, He found Rena had been stabbed more times than he had the nerve to count. He called the police.

When the police arrived, he explained exactly what had happened. He could not explain why the door had been locked: Rena must have locked it, he supposed. Or how her assailant had come in through the window, since she lived four flights up without a fire escape. He explained that the knife was on the table for the salami. There was no blood on the knife—they could see that for themselves.

The police examined Rena more carefully than Hank had.

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They noted that her assailant had stabbed her body almost everywhere except where the two bandages bound her thighs. Under one bandage, they found the rose tattoo and the words: SAM—FOREVER. Under the other an olive branch was twined around a six-inch knife blade. It was a very elaborate tattoo; the knife seemed almost to glint in the overhead light. On the hilt of the knife was inscribed the motto: DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR.

Here and there the knifeblade was dyed a bright red. It was not blood, but it looked like blood. It had not been there when Rena had left Sam Zimmerman's Expert Tattoo Parlor earlier that evening.

THE END

RETURN TO BROBDINGNAG

(*continued from page 117*)

phone, had either been lost at sea or stolen. I sold the *Stella Nova* for the first offer I could get, wired my uncle for money and decided to abandon further exploration of the countries visited by Gulliver.

My uncle, who is a cautious New Englander, at first expressed some disbelief when he received my cable since he had not heard from me since April 3, 1952, when I left England for my first voyage to Lilliput and he had assumed that I had perished at sea. However, using the money I had obtained from the sale of the *Stella Nova*, I called him person-to-person on the trans-Atlantic phone and convinced him of my identity. When he was sure that I was not playing some cruel hoax, he was overjoyed at discovering that I was still alive and gladly cabled the money for my return to the States.

Thanks to my uncle's efforts, I had no trouble establishing myself as an orthopedic surgeon in Boston. I believed that I had foresworn ever going to sea again (and it is almost eighteen months now that I have devoted myself exclusively to practice, to a return to my old social life and the writing of the accounts of my voyages) but, tonight, after dinner, I came across an advertisement in the J.A.M.A. that made my heart pound and my body tighten. It's a brief ad for a ship's surgeon on a freighter going to South America. I must admit I have been working hard these past 18 months and have taken no vacation.

I tried to put the ad away, to ignore it, but how could a little trip to South America do any harm? Let's see now. Where was Gulliver's next trip? Oh, forget Gulliver. Just this once. An ocean trip just for fun, just for a vacation. But Gulliver went to South America, didn't he? Where did I store those maps? **THE END**

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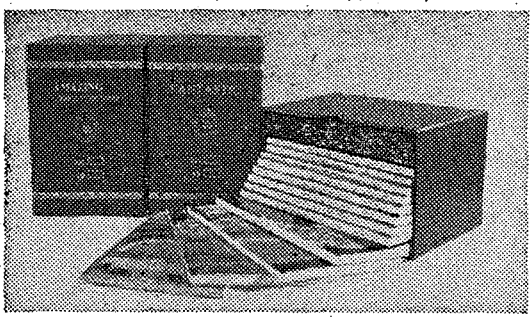

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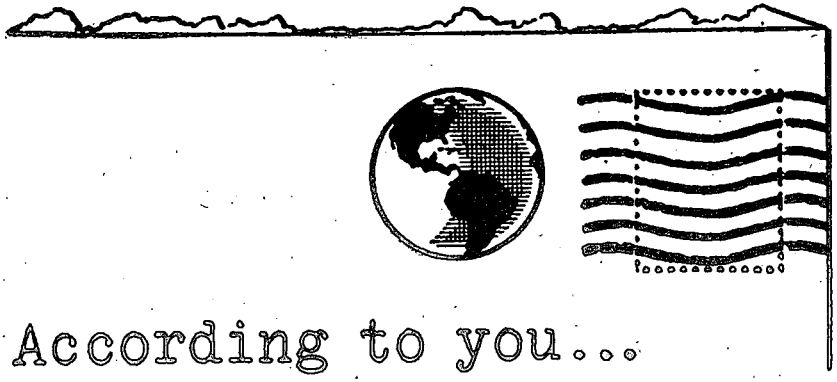

According to you...

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

That cover on the November, 1963 FANTASTIC by Alex Schomburg seems to have real "life" about it; I can almost see the cover civilization *moving*, and can sense the mood of the melancholy desolation.

Paula Crunk, in the lettercol, says: . . . "I love the genre—I want it to produce only beautiful and healthy offspring, not abortions and deformities." The only thing I can say to Miss/Mrs. Crunk is that I can understand the statement . . . but it seems to me it is understated. Do you realize that there have been, and are, writers who can take your "abortions and deformities", in fantasy and science-fantasy, in these "horror stories", these weird and revolting imaginative writings, and make *poetry* out of them? A ghost or a ghoul may not be beautiful in itself, but it takes a truly gifted writer to bring out the fact there *can be* a kind of awesome beauty in ghostly things. Lord Dunsany's writings are beautiful and healthy to the imaginative reader, where the works possess a "fairy-like, dream-like quality". H. P. Lovecraft's works, especially one like *Pickman's Model*, is horrifying and frightening; yet also there is a kind of weird, hidden beauty in it. The works of the late Clark Ashton Smith contain things and images that may be sickening to some readers, but for me they retain a hidden power and control in themselves . . . a frightfully-weird beauty. Fritz Leiber's *A Bit Of the Dark World* horrified me, but even underneath *that* there is the hint of a profound, sterile beauty. But . . . beauty is in the eye of the beholder . . . or the horrored.

Bill Wolfenbarger
602 West Hill St.
Neosho, Missouri

● *One man's deformity is another's idea of loveliness, eh?*

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Isn't there an idea there for a fantasy story?

Dear Editor:

Sometimes I think FANTASTIC deserves a Hugo. Other times I don't. The day I read the November issue was one of these latter days.

Cover: If it has to be trite, ridiculous, and crude, can't it at least be sexy?

"And on the Third Day": Why do sf writers always treat religious topics so self-consciously? Censorship? No, they should not worry there, nothing even halfway sacrilegious ever got by an editor. The writer's own belief? Possibly. More likely though, they probably think it shows respect for religion to go easy and write in a treading-on-eggs style. The result always read like an attempt to gild a lily with brass paint. Even to a complete atheist, the Biblical original has a higher sf content and sense of wonder than something like "And on the Third Day". Courage, authors, courage!

"The Aftertime": I get the impression Sharkey wrote this just to prove he could put an original twist to an old idea. The effort is mildly successful, but obviously strains both the subject matter and the author's skill. Anyway, what's the use? All the author could hope for would be a *tour-de-force* like "The Lady or

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the Tiger," a deliberate flouting of the rules of the craft like failing to resolve your plot-problem or using a worn-out theme. A sort of literary freak show. Also, the story appeals only to those who have read dozens of other Aftermath stories. Someone who hadn't would find it too strained to be believable. If you're going to use material aimed solely at fandom, why not print something better than just a second-rate story? Fanzine reviews for instance. Or if we can't hope for that, just use top-grade original sf.

Barrett's humor wasn't.

"Darkness Box": Do you have to print bad fantasy just because your title is FANTASTIC? If you can't get good stories, bad sf is usually less bad than bad fantasy.

"Witch of the Four Winds": This sort of thing gets stale after a few tens of years of it. If Jakes can't be at least slightly original, and can't match earlier stories stylistically, can't he chuck his ms. into the wastebasket instead of using FANTASTIC for the same purpose?

That was my impression of the November FANTASTIC—a wastebasket for bad sf.

E. E. Evers
118 W 83rd St.
New York, N.Y.

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Dear Editor:

I've often wondered, after reading a good story and discovering through some editorial comment that other editors had rejected it, how editors could make such mistakes. I'm asking the same thing after reading Jack Sharkey's "The Aftertime," only this time I'm wondering why it was bought at all.

This was absolutely the worst piece I've ever read by Sharkey, more disappointing since his stories are usually quite good—sometimes even achieving the rank of a masterpiece (as in "No Harm Done"). I'll admit that "The Aftertime" does have one distinction which most stories don't: it disappointed me four times—even the worst so far have only disappointed me once. It starts out as an After The War story—an old old old theme to which Sharkey adds nothing new or distinctive. Then he throws in a typically low-grade sf movie horror and a How-Will-Our-Heroes-Defeat-This-Menace-To-Humanity? This isn't all, for in the last three pages he pulls out of his hat that old reworked gimmick of everything that has gone before wasn't what we or the hero thought it was. Then he ends it with a strictly nonsensical ending which just about makes you wretch, a last minute "Ah, I've got it!" solution which no one could swallow, but which he actually *makes the solution!*

Even if Sharkey would only have had the two characters run straight into the blue globes with the same thought that this was the answer to the problem and then ended it with Rory and the Colonel being killed just as the others had been, we could have laughed and thought, "What a spoof Sharkey dealt us!" But—we reach the end and it isn't even a spoof.

It's not so much that I dislike old ideas. I like the Brak the Barbarian stories (altho Brak seems a rather colorless name for a hero) even though they're essentially no different from scores of Conan, Fafhrd-Grey Mouser and whatnot tales which have come before. But "The Aftertime" is old ideas coming to nothing and giving no pleasure whatsoever—Brak at least gives pleasure, in fact, evokes a certain sense of wonder in me.

I might add, I've enjoyed every one of Ursula LeGuin's stories that you've published so far. They are a fine blend of fantasy and human feeling. The characters in them often become the real people which Brak, Conan, John Carter and Tarzan (as much as we may enjoy them) never can be.

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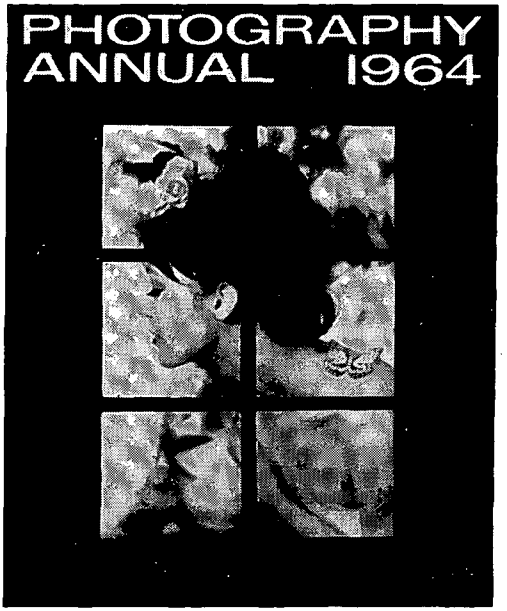

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